REDEFINING HUMANITY IN SCIENCE FICTION: THE ALIEN FROM AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After all these five years, I have come to see the writing of this dissertation as some sort of intergalactic journey and this book as a spaceship arriving at its final destination. As any journey across the universe, my research started with fear and doubts, but it finally ended in success thanks to all those people who supported me along the way. Continuing with the intergalactic metaphor, I would like to thank the sponsors and patrons that made this adventure possible by providing the spaceship and the fuel for my journey. This dissertation would not have been possible without the grant I was awarded by the Autonomous Region of Madrid in 2007, which enabled me to focus on my research for four years as a researcher at the University of Alcalá. I also want to highlight the support of the Franklin Institute of the University of Alcalá, whose resources were of great help, and whose grant Eleanor Roosevelt made the binding of this dissertation possible.

I am also indebted to the whole team of "engineers" whose knowledge helped me with the doubts that appeared throughout my journey. The arrival to my destination would not have been so successful without the support from the members of the research group GIECO, who are not only colleagues but good friends. Their recommendations have been essential to this project and I can only say thank you to all of them. I would also like to thank Dr. Axel Goodbody for his words of advice, both in academic and non-academic issues, during my stay at the University of Bath. And last but not least, I want to recognize the efforts made by the person who has guided me on this journey, Dr. Carmen Flys. Her support and critical advice have shown me the way to follow even at those moments when I could not see the end of the journey.

This last section of acknowledgements is devoted to all the people that have accompanied me these years. Writing a dissertation is a solitary task, but I have always felt my family with me. I have special words of gratitude for my mother and my grandmother Almudena because of their unconditional support, and because they have always encouraged me to follow my dreams. I also want to say thanks to all my friends because of their efforts to understand what my dissertation is about. Finally, I thank Alberto for his company and support in this lonely journey.

And after my thanks to my human companions, I also want to thank my non-human friend Kira, whose silent presence was also of great help.

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Perhaps the most important task for human beings is not to search the stars to converse with cosmic beings but to learn to communicate with the other species that share this planet with us.

(Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 189).

I. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of this dissertation dates back to 2007 with the PhD course on Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice. This course, taught by Professor Carmen Flys, was a turning point in my life as a student since it opened the doors to a research field that allowed me to explore many of my interests together: literature, science fiction, gender and the environment. It was then when Dr. Flys and I commented on the possibility of working on a dissertation about Science Fiction from an ecofeminist perspective, an idea that became real with the realization of the research project "'When they killed even to save life, they died a little themselves.'An Ecofeminist Approach to Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis Series*." This work, which is the point of departure for this dissertation, helped me realize the possibilities of such a popular genre as SF to question the values of our society in terms of otherness, with special interest in the treatment of human and non-human others and the environment.

One of the most decisive moments in the process of elaboration of this dissertation was when the Autonomous Region of Madrid granted me a scholarship to carry out the research for my PhD, which enabled me to work full-time on this project. This scholarship was in itself an achievement since my proposal was focused on the literary analysis of feminist Science Fiction works with special focus on issues of gender and the environment, and ecofeminism was relatively unknown in literary criticism in Spain, and SF was still regarded as a marginal genre of the literary canon. But the most visible achievement of all these years of research and work is precisely this dissertation which highlights the power of popular genres to work as vehicles of social criticism and of alternative and healthier lifestyles.

When I started this dissertation, one of my goals was to show how literature can help us create a better world by inviting readers to reflect on the world we live in, with special attention to the environment and the relationship with the *other*. Although some critics believe that realist fiction may seem the more appropriate vehicle to do so, I think—following Darko Suvin and Patrick Murphy, among others—that the particularities of Science Fiction make of the genre a useful tool to question our values and our society. Science Fiction has usually been defined as an escapist genre because it portrays worlds different from our own. But many Science Fiction critics prefer to consider the genre as extrapolative, which implies that Science Fiction is about the world we live in as described from an estranged vantage point

that enables the author to explore real problems from the perspective of the outsider. This process of defamiliarization positions the reader as an objective observer of his/her own world, making it easier to perceive and reflect on the conflicts of our society. Considering the environment, some Science Fiction novels about environmental degradation and ecological catastrophes have proved more fruitful in raising awareness about the possible future consequences of our failed relationship with the Earth. In this sense, Science Fiction is not only appropriate for speculating about the results of our actions nowadays, but it is also an interesting vehicle for proposing solutions to the social and environmental conflicts we face today.

The extrapolative character of Science Fiction is especially interesting from an ecofeminist point of view because it serves the two main goals of ecofeminism: to question oppressive attitudes and unhealthy social systems and to propose alternative lifestyles based on an ethics of care and respectful practices towards the *other*, including nature. In this sense, the estranged point of view that Science Fiction allows writers to adopt enables readers to approach reality in a defamiliarized way. This way, readers are able to identify more easily those values embedded in our social structures that sanction and perpetuate oppression. The speculative nature of Science Fiction is also interesting for ecofeminists because it offers the possibility of imagining alternative—and healthier—social systems from which we can learn to improve our own reality.

Ecofeminists argue that humans have failed to recognize the seriousness of the ecological crisis because we no longer see ourselves as part of nature; that is, we have "a weakened sense of the reality of our embeddedness in nature" (Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 97). In this sense, Patrick Murphy comments that in order to "understand our appropriate ecological niche" we need to recognize that "humans are not only things-in themselves and things-for-us but also things-for-others, including the stable evolution of the biosphere" ("Ground, Pivot, Motion" 230). Ecofeminist authors also criticize the patterns of domination that have relegated women and nature—together with other human and non-human others—to a powerless position in Western culture, which has provoked the environmental crisis we face nowadays. But ecofeminists do not only criticize the unhealthy social systems that sanction oppressive attitudes since they also promote alternative lifestyles and an ethics of care that help humans understand their place in nature and their dependence on it, as well as respect for the *other* in his/her/its uniqueness.

Regarding all this, the main purpose of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which Science Fiction and ecofeminism can benefit the one from the other. The freedom that

Science Fiction writers enjoy enables them to speculate with realities that mirror our own in such a way that the problems of our world can be extrapolated to an alternative one. These alternative worlds may be used to warn readers about the social and environmental conflicts of our days, whose consequences are often portrayed in dystopic and disaster novels as a way to invite readers to reflect on the failed relationship with nature and the *other*. But these worlds also serve to explore how ecofeminist values may be socially and culturally developed in order to create a healthy society. Therefore, these writers help us envision that non-hierarchical and non-oppressive frameworks of thought are possible, but that we need to build anew our value system by replacing oppression and domination with respect and understanding.

My starting point is that both Octavia Butler and Joan Slonczewski use Science Fiction to explore the value systems of human beings, especially in relation with the o*ther*, with gender and with the environment. In this respect, the interesting aspect of these novels is that they establish a contrast between an alien civilization and a human—or human-like—one, thus inviting readers to reflect on and question the functioning of our society. The alien civilizations that the authors imagine—the Oankali and Sharers, respectively—offer alternative conceptual frameworks that echo ecofeminist and environmentalist ideals, and that move readers to reconsider the sustainability of our value system. The strategy that both authors use to make readers aware of the problems of our society is to extrapolate these problems into an alternative reality of which readers are external observers. In so doing, they subtly criticize those values and attitudes that they consider dangerous for the survival of the human species, thus complying with one of the goals of ecofeminism. The other most prominent goal of ecofeminism is that of proposing conceptual frameworks that reject hierarchical thinking in favor of practices based on care and respect. This alternative society would then recognize the interconnectedness of life forms that both ecofeminists and environmentalists defend while promoting the well-being of earth others. In this sense, both Butler and Slonczewski imagine civilizations whose understanding of life is based on the belief on the interdependence of all the members of an ecosystem.

As I stated before, the main goal of this dissertation is to establish a fruitful relationship between Science Fiction and ecofeminism, focusing on Butler's *Xenogenesis* Series and in Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*, but in order to do so I have established secondary goals that support the main one. The first one is to study how both authors portray the natural world in their novels. In this sense I am also interested in the relationship that the characters of these works establish with the world that surrounds them. On the one hand, my

aim is to explore the patterns of domination and exploitation to which the human—or human-like—characters of the novel subject the environment. In so doing we can understand to what extent these texts work as metaphors of our relationship with the Earth. On the other hand, I want to focus my attention on the sustainable lifestyles of the alien civilizations imagined by the authors in order to envision how we can improve our treatment of the Earth.

The next secondary goal is related with the portrayal of science and of scientific research in the novels. Butler's and Slonczewski's aliens understand science as part of their culture and of their everyday life, so I want to see how this conception of science affects the relationship of the alien characters with the environment, in contrast with humans' perception of the scientific sphere. This is especially interesting if we take into account that humans have used scientific knowledge to exploit nature rather than to respect and understand it. So in this dissertation I will explore if alternative sciences also entail healthier relationships with the *other* and with the natural world. Besides, I am particularly concerned with how the authors approach the issue of genetic engineering and its controversies in terms of consent and of manipulation.

The third secondary goal is to study how these works explore the concept of gender and how they challenge the dualism male/female by creating blurred genderless (and sexless) identities. By focusing on the portrayal of gender in these works my purpose is to analyze how the cultural notion of gender can be deconstructed in societies in which individuals do not develop a sexual identity until adulthood. The idea of blurred gender boundaries is also interesting if we consider certain characters—in Butler's novel—and how they defy our assumptions about sex and gender. Another purpose in the analysis of gender is to challenge the notion that biology determines the development of certain attitudes and behaviors, for example, that women are more empathic and sensitive by nature. In order to do so we need to consider the personalities of the characters of both novels as well as their reactions.

A fourth secondary objective is the exploration of the dualism self/*other* and its extrapolation in the novels in the dualistic pair human/alien. Achieving this objective comprises the study of how otherness is represented in the novels and how the authors play with this concept through the character of the alien. Feminist Science Fiction writers incorporate the traditional figure of the alien to reflect on the oppressive patterns to which the *other*—including women—has been subjugated. For this reason, my purpose is to study how the concept of alienness is developed in the novel, paying special attention to how alien and human identities interact. As with gender identities, I am especially interested in the boundary between human and alien and how both Butler and Slonczewski play with it by shifting points

of view and by using multiple narrative voices. In this sense, I want to analyze how the authors use different narrators to reflect the diversity of characters in the novels—which work as metaphors of the diversity of our own world. In so doing, these authors give voice to both humans and aliens—to the self and the *other*—thus establishing a fruitful dialogue that helps readers understand alienness—and otherness—in its uniqueness.

Finally, my fifth secondary objective is to apply ecofeminist theories to the *Xenogenesis* Series and to *A Door into Ocean.* By using an ecofeminist theoretical framework I want to analyze to what extent the characters of these novels comply with ecofeminist attitudes and practices. In order to do so, I will study the different social values and conceptual frameworks portrayed in the novels, with special interest in the contrast between human-like and alien civilizations. Through this study it will be possible to analyze how these imaginary societies perpetuate oppressive behaviors, or if they propose alternative lifestyles closer to what ecofeminists define as an ideal society. Regarding this, I follow two of the most relevant goals of ecofeminism: denouncing oppressive attitudes towards the so called *other*, and proposing healthier and more respectful ways of sharing this world with its other inhabitants.

All the secondary objectives above mentioned are intertwined in relation to the main goal of this dissertation, that is, the exploration of the relationship between Science Fiction and ecofeminism, and particularly how both can work together in specific literary works. For the achievement of this goal, I have divided this dissertation into two main parts: one devoted to the theoretical framework, and the other focused on the literary analysis of two novels that represent how productive the interaction between Science Fiction and ecofeminism can be. Chapter II explores the literary genre of Science Fiction and the different definitions that authors and critics have proposed. It also analyzes the chronology of the genre with special focus on its evolution in the 20th century, an evolution that shows how the genre is no longer a marginal and escapist type of literature but a popular one that offers an *estranged* depiction of the real world and the problems we face today. Within this chapter, section 2.4 is devoted to feminist Science Fiction, the subgenre to which the two novels analyzed in this dissertation belong, and it emphasizes the importance of women writers of Science Fiction with prominent figures such as Ursula LeGuin or Octavia Butler. This section also explores the portrayal of feminist utopias in feminist Science Fiction, since they are common in novels that explore gender conflicts. The third section of this chapter is focused on the characters of the alien and the cyborg, creatures that are used as metaphors to explore otherness. Finally, the last section of this chapter analyzes the relationship between Science Fiction and nature, which has been

especially productive if we consider disaster novels and other writings about natural catastrophes. The main goal of this Chapter II is to present an overview of the developments of the genre in relation to the portrayal of social conflicts such as those that have to do with gender, environmental problems, and otherness. This chapter provides a complete background for the later literary analysis, including references from both Science fiction critics and writers.

Chapter III consists of a complete overview of the ecofeminist movement including its origins, definition, and evolution. In section 3.1 I analyze the different types of ecofeminism that exist emphasizing that, despite their differences, all ecofeminisms agree on the idea that women and nature—as well as any other entity labeled as the *other*—have suffered the same patterns of domination and that for this reason, they should be liberated together. Section 3.2 comments on the critiques of ecofeminism made by some authors, but it also analyzes the answers of ecofeminists to those criticisms. The third section of this chapter explores the different types of the interconnections that have been historically established between women and nature. Following these interconnections, section 3.4 is devoted to the concept of Gaia and its implications for both women and nature, while also considering how ecofeminists and environmentalists react to this concept. Finally, section 3.5 offers an overview of the attitudes and values that ecofeminists want to eradicate from our society: oppressive conceptual frameworks, dualistic thinking and the elements of a logic of domination. This last section also depicts the features that characterize an ecofeminist society, according to the partnership ethic proposed by Carolyn Merchant. Then, Chapter III completes the theoretical framework that supports the literary analysis developed in chapter V.

Chapter IV offers a critical perspective on the authors of the works explored in the dissertation, Octavia Butler and Joan Slonczewski. Sections 4.1 and 4.6 analyze the biography of Butler and Slonczewski, respectively. I include a complete account of the author's lives because some of their personal experiences are reflected in their writings, as we will see. Sections 4.2 and 4.7 include an account of the works published by both authors up to now, with special interest in the main topics of these works and in the main features of each author's fiction. In sections 4.3 and 4.8 there are detailed summaries of the plots of *Lilith's Brood* (or *Xenogenesis* Series) and of *A Door into Ocean* so that the subsequent literary analysis of the works makes sense to the reader unfamiliar with the novels. Finally, in 4.4 and 4.9 I point out the themes and issues of both novels that have been analyzed in critical articles. Although not all of this critical work is directly related to the goal of this dissertation,

some of the ideas that appear in those articles are interesting for an ecofeminist approach to the novels.

As we can see, Chapters II, III and IV encompass the theoretical and critical information that will be used for the analysis of the novels, to which chapter V is devoted. Whereas Chapters II and III offer a large overview of Science Fiction—mainly as a literary genre—and of ecofeminism, respectively; Chapter IV focuses on the biography of the authors whose novels are analyzed here, as well as on their career as Science Fiction writers, and the main themes and plots of their works. With all the information covered in these three chapters we obtain the background and theoretical knowledge that enables the literary analysis of Chapter V.

Chapter V offers a complete commentary on the novels and it is divided into six sections. In the first section of this chapter the novels are approached from a narrative perspective in order to see the relationship between their stories and the way they are told. The subsequent sections are focused on a specific theme following more or less the secondary goals of this dissertation. Each theme is firstly analyzed in the *Xenogenesis* Series and then in *A Door into Ocean*, with a final brief conclusion about the similarities and differences in the treatment of the theme in both novels. Section 5.2 analyzes how the environment is portrayed in both works and how the relationship between the characters and the place that surrounds them is. In section 5.3 I offer an account of how the civilizations that appear in the novels understand science. Other issues referred to in this section are genetic experimentation and its controversies, and reproduction. Section 5.4 is concerned with the portrayal of gender and of gender conflicts, and with representation of the concept of family. In section 5.5 I explore the implications of the dualism alien/human and how humanness and alienness are interpreted in these literary works. Finally, an ecofeminist analysis of the novels is carried out in section 5.6, in which ecofeminist theories—especially those of Warren and Plumwood—are used in order to see to what extent the societies in *Lilith's Brood* and in *A Door into Ocean* comply with ecofeminist values.

After the theoretical framework exposed in chapters II, III and IV and the literary analysis of the different sections of chapter V, chapter VI encompasses the conclusions reached throughout the dissertation. The conclusion shows how the different parts of this work have contributed to the exploration of the interactions between Science Fiction and ecofeminism in Butler's and Slonczsewki's works. Chapter VI contains all the bibliographical references and finally, Chapter VIII includes a summary in Spanish of the main issues

developed in the dissertation, including information from both the theoretical framework and to the literary analysis.

II. SCIENCE FICTION

The first problem a scholar faces when working with Science Fiction is that of finding an appropriate definition of the term. But even before attempting to describe what Science Fiction is, one has to consider the term itself. The first time the phrase 'science fiction' appeared, according to Edward James, was in 1851 "in a treatise on the poetry of science by the English writer William Wilson" (*Science* 7). However, for almost thirty years the term did not appear again except for an editorial response to a letter to the magazine *Amazing Stories: The Magazine of Scientifiction* in 1927. The term 'scientifiction' had been invented by Hugo Gernsback and he used it "to characterize the contents of *Amazing Stories*, one of the many magazines that he edited" (Roberts, *Science* 2). In 1929, Gernsback decided to switch the term of his own coinage to 'science fiction' because it sounded better. Thanks to the magazine *Astounding Stories*, which became *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1938, the term became widely popular. For many years the use of the term was limited to the stories that appeared in magazines such as Gernsback's and to the anthologies that collected that type of stories (Roberts, *Science* 2). It was not until 1950 that the term Science Fiction started being applied, not only to magazine fiction but also to paperback novels. Therefore, great Science Fiction novelists such as H.G. Wells, Jules Verne or Mary Shelley had published their works decades before the coinage of the term that was later used to label these writers' fiction.

Since the origins of the genre, it became common to refer to it by different shortened forms. At first, when 'scientifiction' was coined by Gernsback, people referred to the genre as 'stf'. The abbreviation 'stf' was widely used during the 1940s, but from then onwards, it was less and less used. The most common abbreviations for science fiction still used nowadays are 'sf' (or SF or S-F) and sci-fi. Those using sci-fi are usually considered new to the genre by the initiated ones, who limit the use of the term sci-fi to refer to Science Fiction of poor quality (James, *Science* 10). Another use of the abbreviation sci-fi is the one Edward James points out: that sci-fi is commonly used within film and television circles, to the extent that nowadays it is the name of a channel devoted to emissions of series and movies classified as Science Fiction (*Science* 10). At the same time, the abbreviation SF has not only been associated to 'science fiction', but also to 'space ficton', 'science fantasy', 'speculative fiction' or even 'structural fabulation' (Broderick, *Reading* 3).[1]

[1] From now onwards I will be using the abbreviated form SF because it is one of the most widely used.

Since its origin, the genre has been always associated with ambiguity and multiplicity, so it is not surprising to find that throughout its history, SF has always resisted an easy definition. Carl Freedman states that any attempt to critically discuss the genre firstly devotes "considerable attention to the problem of definition" (13). A possible starting point in the search for a definition for SF would be the general definition provided in the 1979 edition of *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, where SF is defined as an "imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel" (1541). This definition includes one of the most prominent features of SF, that is, the fact that the genre is an imaginative fiction and not a realistic one.[2] This definition can be described as a broad one since it comprises some of the possible scenarios and plots that have usually characterized SF: futuristic settings, space travel and time travel. However, the definitions given by SF critics and writers tend to be more specific and more theoretically complex, as the one proposed by Darko Suvin which we will see later.

SF critic Adam Roberts's definition of the genre is similar to the previous one since in both cases the genre is described as an imaginative type of fiction whose focus is on a world different from our own—usually because of a scientific element. Roberts defines SF as a literary genre that "distinguishes its fictional worlds to one degree or another from the world in which we actually live: a fiction of the imagination rather than observed reality, a fantastic literature" (1). Roberts's definition does not include the scientific component of SF and it highlights the idea that SF is 'a fiction of the imagination' and 'a fantastic literature,' which may be considered controversial.[3]

In his book *Popular Culture Genres,* Arthur A. Berger acknowledges the controversy that exists around SF. In his definition of the genre he firstly states that in SF "we are dealing with texts […] that involve science, somehow, and are fictions, or fabricated stories" (132). Even though Berger also recognizes the imaginative or fabricated character of SF narratives, he goes beyond the definition of the genre as a (fabricated) fiction about science and explains that SF "is to a greater degree, it would seem, about human courage, about relationships among people, about resoluteness in the face of danger, about human curiosity about the unknown, and science is only a factor in these texts" (Berger 132). In this second quote we see how Berger moves from a narrow definition of the genre as a mixture of science and

[2] Even though realistic fiction is also imaginative since it is fiction, the author uses the term imaginative here to refer to non-realistic fiction.

[3] Although both SF and fantasy portray different worlds from our own and the terms appear sometimes together, they are considered two differentiated genres and the reasons for this will be analyzed later on.

fiction, and includes one of the main ideas of the genre, that is, the curiosity about the unknown. As we will see, most SF authors nowadays use SF to talk about the encounter with difference, with the unknown, and to explore human relationships even when they use non-human characters. Berger's definition is of interest because it not only includes the scientific component, but also the idea that SF reflects human relationships and the curiosity for the unknown.

Other SF critics and authors have also contributed to the debate around how to define SF. For example, Brooks Landon states that "science fiction is the literature of change. More precisely, science fiction is the kind of literature that most explicitly and self-consciously takes change as its subject and its teleology" (xi). Landon takes this idea of SF being the literature of change from SF writer Fredrik Phol. Phol considers SF as a literature of change in the sense that a SF writer decomposes the real world into small parts, taking some of these parts away and replacing them with new ones creating a completely new world (Landon 6). If for Pohl and Landon SF is the literature of change, for SF writer Ursula Le Guin, SF is metaphor. Le Guin explains that all fiction is metaphor, but what makes SF different from other genres is its use of "new metaphors, drawn from certain great dominants of our contemporary life—science, all the sciences, and technology, and the relativistic and the historical outlook, among them. Space travel is one of these metaphors; so is an alternative society, an alternative biology; the future is another. The future, in fiction, is a metaphor" ("Introduction" 133).

Despite the vast number of definitions given by SF critics and authors, Darko Suvin's definition of the genre in his book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is probably the best known one. For Suvin, fiction can be divided into different genres "according to the manner in which men's relationships to other men and their surroundings are illuminated" (18). On the one hand, he uses the term 'naturalistic fiction' in order to refer to those fictions that reproduce faithfully what he calls "empirical textures and surfaces vouched for human senses and common sense" (18), and within this type of fiction we could include all the types of narratives labeled as realist. On the other hand, Suvin classifies as 'estranged fiction' those narratives that portray "a radically or significantly different formal framework—a different space/time location or central figures for the fable, unverifiable by common sense" (18).

According to Suvin's definition, the label 'estranged fiction' would include both SF and fantasy, an association that has sometimes been confusing and/or controversial. Because of their similarities as estranged types of fiction, both genres can be found together in panels at conferences, in associations such as SFWA—Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of

America—or in publishing houses such as Ace Books. Some critics have found it difficult to distinguish between the two genres because both portray alternative worlds, and an example of this is Adam Robert's definition of SF as a type of fantastic literature (1); and even more significantly, Northrop Frye's idea of SF: "Science fiction frequently tries to imagine what life would be like on a plane as far above us as we are above savagery; its setting is often of a kind that appears to us as technologically miraculous. It is thus a mode of romance with a strong inherent tendency to myth" (49). Frye states that the setting in SF appears as "technologically miraculous", a concept that may be related to the idea that SF is usually concerned with some sort of scientific discovery. However, the last part of Frye's definition talks of SF as having "a strong inherent tendency to myth", which implies that SF cannot be explained on logical terms. Patrick Parrinder is one of the critics who rejects Frye's definition because he thinks that SF does not tend to myth, because it is loyal "to logic, probability and the cognitive intelligence" (*Science* 50). But, in order to better understand the differences between SF and fantasy, we need to continue analyzing Suvin's definition because even if he uses the term 'estranged fiction' to refer both to SF and to fantasy, he makes it clear that those genres should be treated separately because of the cognitive element of SF. Although the term cognition will be analyzed later in relation to Suvin's definition of SF, for him, cognition is what "differentiates it [SF] not only from myth, but also from the folk (fairy) tale and the fantasy" (8). Tales, fantasy and SF can be put together under the label of estranged fiction, but in the case of SF, the displacement from our world—the estrangement—is based on a scientific discovery or invention rather than on magic or some other non-logical element. In a similar way but with different words, British SF writer and critic Kingsley Amis summarized the difference between fantasy and SF in the following terms: "science fiction (…) maintains a respect for fact or presumptive fact, fantasy makes a point of flouting these" (22).

As previously mentioned, cognition is what separates SF and fantasy, but it is also one of the main elements in Suvin's definition of SF. In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* Suvin describes the genre as follows:

> It should be defined as a fictional tale determined by the hegemonic literary device of a *locus* and/or *dramatis personae* that (1) are *radically or at least significantly different from the empirical times, places, and characters* of 'mimetic' or 'naturalist' fiction, but (2) are nonetheless—to the extent that SF differs from other 'fantastic' genres, that is, ensembles of fictional tales without empirical validation—simultaneously perceived as *not impossible* within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch. (viii; emphasis in original)

This definition includes the two main points of Suvin's idea of SF, while also explaining how SF is different from realistic fiction and from fantasy. In the first case, SF differs from naturalistic fiction because the former portrays a different reality from that of the author, in terms of characters or place/time. In the second case, for Suvin, SF and fantasy should not be confused because the new reality in a SF work can be validated through cognition, whereas fantasy is *impossible* if we consider the reality of its author.

In the first pages of *Metamorphoses*, Suvin continues developing his definition of the genre using a terminology that has become part of SF theory and that is widely used by SF critics. Suvin talks about the presence of "a *locus* and/or *dramatis personae* that (1) are *radically or at least significantly different from the empirical times, places, and characters* of 'mimetic' or 'naturalist' fiction" (viii) and that is what he refers to as the *novum*. For Suvin, the *novum* is that element that is "significantly different from what is the norm in 'naturalistic' or empiricist fiction" (3). This *novum* or innovation can be of different types and of different degrees of magnitude. As Suvin explains the *novum* can be just a "discrete new 'invention'" as a gadget or a technique, but it can also consist of a whole setting, which he describes as a "spatiotemporal locus." In many cases, the *novum* is represented by a non-human character such as the aliens, the robot or the cyborg (64).

Suvin took the concept of *novum* from the German philosopher Ernst Bloch, for whom the *novum* "refers to those concrete innovations in lived history that awaken human collective consciousness out of a static present to awareness that history can be changed" (Csicsery-Ronan, "Marxist" 119). Although Suvin started using the term *novum* in the 1970s, he was only choosing a name for an idea that had always existed in SF. Since its beginnings, as Farah Mendlesohn points out, SF has been characterized for the "creation of a new invention, or an arrival in a new place" that broke the mimesis that existed between the author's reality and that of his work (3). For most authors, the *novum* is the most important element in SF because it is the *novum* what unites all types of SF, the portrayal of a world somehow different from our own (Jones 163), and it is precisely the *novum* that usually shapes the events that take place in the story (James, *Science* 108).

Regarding the *novum*, we could also say that other estranged genres, such as fantasy, also have a *novum* element. However, as previously mentioned, the *novum* in SF is rational and based on cognition, that is, it is opposed to the kind of "supernatural intrusions of marvelous tales, ghost stories, high fantasy and other genres of the fantastic" (Csicsery-Ronan, "Marxist" 118-9). Although the *novum* is recognized as non-true, because it is not part of the author's real world, it is "not-unlike true, not-flatly-(in the current state of knowledge)-

impossible" (Shippey 14). Therefore, in order for the *novum* to work in a SF text, it needs to be "validated by cognitive logic," as Darko Suvin points out (63). To talk about cognition in SF is to talk about that aspect of SF that invites us "to try and understand, to comprehend, the alien landscape of a given SF book, film or story" (A. Roberts 8). Another key concept in Suvin's definition of the genre is that of estrangement. Suvin states that he understands SF as "the *literature of cognitive estrangement*" (4); then, he adds some pages later that "*SF is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment"* (8; emphasis in original). From this last quote we can extract the three main ideas that make up Suvin's definition: estrangement, cognition and *novum*.

What Suvin considers estrangement is the result of two concepts of literary theory that already existed under that same name. On the one hand, it comes from what Russian Formalists such as V. Shklovsky and B. Tomashevsky called *ostranenie* or de-familiarization, which consists of the idea that "art always makes the receiver aware of reality in an intensely fresh way, subverting and 'roughening' the habitual responses one develops in the routines of everyday existence" (Csicsery-Ronan, "Marxist" 118). In other words, art makes audiences conceive reality in a de-familiarized way by observing it from the point of view of the outsider. On the other hand, Suvin takes the idea of estrangement from Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (or alienation), who took the Russian Formalists' concept and transformed it for his own ends. Brecht applied the estrangement to theatre, believing it was a kind of political act with the purpose of making the audience aware of their situation by drawing their attention to the fact that the spectacle was just an illusion (Csicsery-Ronan, "Marxist" 118). In his own words, Brecht expressed in his *Short Organon for the Theatre* that "a representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (qtd. in Suvin 6). Therefore, when a SF story is set in a world different from our own, this alternative reality works as a mirror reflection of our own, so readers are able to see their own reality from an estranged point of view.

For the Russian Formalists and for Brecht, estrangement was just a technique they used in their works, but in SF estrangement is one of the defining elements of the genre—together with cognition. It is precisely the cognitive estrangement what differentiates SF from realistic and from fantastic genres as well, a concept interpreted by many SF critics. For Tom Shippey, estrangement means recognizing the *novum,* and the process through which this *novum* is evaluated and understood is what he refers to as cognition (Shippey 15).

Postmodernist critic Brian McHale also explores the idea of cognitive estrangement as the main feature that distinguishes SF from fantasy:

> By "estrangement" he [Suvin] means very nearly the Russian formalists' *ostranenie*, but a specifically ontological *ostranenie*, confronting the empirical givens of our world with something *not* given, something from outside or beyond it, "a strange newness, a *novum*." By qualifying this estrangement as "cognitive," Suvin means to eliminate purely mythopoetic projections that have no standing in a world-view founded on logic, reason, positive science. (*Postmodernism* 59; emphasis in original)

Other critics have moved beyond the objective interpretation of Suvin's definition and have reflected on how the intrinsic features of SF—cognition, estrangement and novum—may be used for social criticism. For Patrick Parrinder, the idea of estrangement does not only allow the reader to escape from reality but it also sows dissatisfaction and "the determination and ability to change it" (72). Edward James also points out how some SF works invite readers to explore the differences between the fictional and the real world since he sees SF "as intended primarily to comment on our own world, 'through metaphor and extrapolation'" (*Science* 111). Istvan Cscisery-Ronay agrees with the previous critics in the fact that since SF mixes the rational and the marvelous to challenge the reader's vision of reality, it is natural to SF to critically provoke ("Science Fiction" 43). As a speculative genre that provides infinite answers to the question 'what if', SF invites readers to critically reflect on their world, or, as Brooks Landon posits, SF is "an excuse for thinking" (36) and that in doing so, the genre "promotes better thinking" (33). Landon's idea of better thinking is related to the possibilities that SF offers to explore social and environmental problems, inviting readers to reflect on them and to look for solutions. Throughout the 20th century, and as the definitions of SF changed and evolved to become more complex, the genre has also rewritten itself. Science fiction is no longer a fiction about scientific discoveries, but it has become one of the most interesting vehicles for social criticism. As Darko Suvin states, SF has moved into the realm of anthropological thought, it has become a way of warning society about the consequences of the actions of the present without having to wait for the future; but, the most important feature of the genre is that it does not only criticize and warn, but it also enables readers to envision alternatives (12). This twofold nature of SF is especially interesting from an ecofeminist point of view since authors are able to critically comment on specific social conflicts while proposing solutions at the same time.

2.1 HISTORY

Since the genre of SF resists an easy definition, it is not surprising to find that there have also been some controversies regarding the origins of the genre. SF critic Adam Roberts points out that SF has been "a common factor across a wide range of different histories and cultures" (37), and that makes it more complicated to identify a date or a novel as the beginning of the genre. There have been examples of 'estranged' episodes all through literary history, descriptions of heroic figures living adventures, travelling to strange places and fighting legendary creatures. From Roberts' point of view Kepler's *Somnium* would be the first SF text as such. According to his opinion, this book by the German astronomer published in 1634 could be recognized as the first SF work because it contains "the more specifically materialist idiom of the fantastic" (38). However, he also states that even though the history of SF is a long one, maybe "only those texts still 'alive'" should be included, so he points out Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as the first SF novel (42). It was precisely at the end of the 19th century when the genre started to become what it is today thanks to the works of Jules Verne, whose works were published in the second half of the 19th century, and of H.G. Wells, whose career as a writer started in the 1890s and who is considered the "pivotal figure in the evolution of the scientific romance into modern science fiction" (Parrinder 10).

The beginnings of SF were associated to several magazines published in the first half of the 20th century; in fact, magazines became the main vehicle for publishing SF stories from the 1920s to the 1950s (Csicsery-Ronay, "Science Fiction" 45). Hugo Gernsback, who coined the term 'science fiction', was the editor who established "the institution of the SF pulps" with his magazine *Amazing Stories* (Csicsery-Ronay, "Science Fiction" 47). Pulp magazines were called so because of the cheap woodpulp paper on which they were printed (Atterby 32). These magazines did not only represent the first steps of SF literature, but they were also famous for the SF criticism they contained. Although there were also books, comics, movies and radio plays, SF magazines were "chiefly responsible for creating a sense of sf as a distinctive genre" (Atterby 32). The first important magazine was *Amazing Stories*, founded in 1926 by Hugo Gernsback (A. Roberts 51). Gernsback worked hard to define the genre of SF, and to establish the "defining qualities of commercial SF in language that combined manifesto and commercial how-to manual" (Csicsery-Ronay, "Science Fiction" 47). For example, Gernsback preferred the type of SF grounded in science since he was interested in the educational or didactic power of the genre apart from its ability to entertain readers (A.

Roberts 51-2), so he envisioned SF as "a teaching tool, but one that did not make its teaching obvious" (Atterby 33).

The didactic nature of SF was also supported by another important figure of the pulps, John W. Campbell. In 1937, John W. Campbell became the editor of *Astounding Stories*, replacing F. Orlin Tremaine. A year after he became editor, Campbell changed the name of the magazine to *Astounding Science-Fiction.* Critics like Edward James (*Science* 88) or Brian Atterby (37) consider the years of Campbell as editor of *Astounding* as the Golden Age of SF. Many of the most famous SF writers started publishing their works in this magazine while serving as inspiration for future writers. Besides, thanks to first Gernsback's and then Cambell's efforts, SF writing became little by little an established profession (Csicsery-Ronay, "Science Fiction" 47). The Golden Age of SF was also a time when works of better quality started to appear. "Standard sf pulp adventures" gave way to more serious works in which "many of the classic themes of sf were tackled" (James, *Science* 88). Although some authors state that this Golden Age lasted until the end of the 1940s, critics like Edward James claim that the 1950s were the true classic era of the genre. From his point of view, the 1930s and 1940s laid the foundations for the improvement of SF that was noticeable since the 1950s. The ideas introduced in the previous decades were explored in detail in the 1950s. Moreover, the short story stopped being the main SF written format and "there was more scope for novel-length treatment" (James, *Science* 88). Some of the writers that wrote during this Golden Age period in SF using the American pulps to start or consolidate their careers were Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury or Robert Heinlein.

In Great Britain, SF was a step behind, since it did not occupy such an important place as American SF did. However, the fanzine—magazine for fans—*Nova Terrae*, with a base in London, turned into the magazine *New Worlds.* In 1949 *New Worlds* evolved and became "a professional magazine in the American mode" (Atterby 42). The emergence of this magazine encouraged the British renaissance of SF as many famous writers such as Brian Aldiss, John Brunner and J.G. Ballard, contributed to it with their works. Though little by little SF was being recognized worldwide as a literary and professional genre, there were still those critics that considered SF in terms of "pulp formulas and movie monsters" (Atterby 45).

After the golden era that SF experienced in the 1950s, the first years of the 1960s saw how the genre "had become complacent, recycling with minor modification a small number of tropes and ideas" (Broderick, "New Wave" 50). However, in the mid 1960s SF lived another climatic period known as the New Wave—taken and adapted from the French cinema's *nouvelle vague* (Broderick, "New Wave" 49). The term was used to describe a group of

writers from the 1960s and 1970s that produced a new type of SF, rejecting the established conventions of the genre and experimenting with new techniques never used before in SF (A. Roberts 62). At first, the term was associated with the British magazine *New Worlds* at the time when Michael Moorcock was its editor (A. Roberts 62). Moorcock wanted writers to reject traditional literary values associated with the SF of the 1950s, and to try to combine SF with contemporary literary styles. An interesting fact is that most of the writers classified within this movement—J.G. Ballard, Briand Aldiss or John Brunner—repudiated the term and rejected being placed within the New Wave.

Meanwhile, in the United States SF had become an important literary genre that not only attracted the attention of Leftist academics and students, but of mass culture as well (Csicsery-Ronan, "Marxist" 117). As in the United Kingdom, American SF writers such as of Philip K. Dick, Ray Bradbury, Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin or Samuel R. Delany experimented with the genre producing works of great quality from an artistic point of view, but also with political contents developed in a sophisticated way (Csicsery-Ronan, "Marxist" 117; Atterby 39). These authors represent the change in SF that marked the beginning of what SF is today; that is, a combination of "sophisticated social critique with adventurous stylistic experimentation" (Csicsery-Ronay, "Science Fiction" 50). In fact, one of the most important ways in which theses authors improved the quality of the genre was by experimenting with narrative techniques and crossing genre lines as a result of the influence of postmodernism in mainstream literature (Melzer 5).

SF had always been criticized because of its focus on object instead of on subject; that is, SF writers usually forgot about the development of the characters in their stories because they were more interested in the story itself. However, this changed in the 1950s and 1960s when characters stopped being mere stereotypes. During the Golden Age of the 1930s and 1940s editors wanted characters to be flat and simple since the audience, mainly male adolescents, "were interested in action-packed adventure, not characters" (Cioffi 85). However, during the so called New Wave, writers started exploring the psychology of the characters they portrayed while developing them in depth. This shift from object to subject was especially interesting regarding female characters. Until 1960s almost all SF had been associated with white males, although there had already been some exceptions. But, since the New Wave in the 1960s, SF opened to other types of writers as well as to other types of audiences (Clute 64). Many writers belonging to ethnic minorities or to the feminist movement realized the possibilities that SF offered for exploring and reconceptualizing power relations.

Feminists had always been very critical of SF because for most of its history, the genre had been associated with white male adolescents looking for adventure. Until the 1950s and 1960s few women writers had chosen SF to express themselves, something rather ironic taking into account that precisely a woman—Mary Shelley—was one of the first figures of the genre. However, during the 1950s and 1960s the situation started to change when women writers realized the possibilities of SF to rewrite gender relations and to reject patriarchy while proposing alternative social structures. The historical period of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was a significant one regarding social issues since it was at this time when the Civil Rights, feminist and environmental movements took place. Many supporters of these social movements started to use SF to attack oppressive conceptual frameworks that relegated the *other*—women, ethnic minorities, nature, and so on—to a subjugated position. For example, feminist writers of SF challenged patriarchy by giving voice to female characters. Traditionally, women had had no voice in SF stories since they had been relegated to a second position as "wives, girlfriends, scientists' daughters, or rewards for heroic deeds performed" (Cioffi 84). From the 1970s onwards, and as women's position in society changed in their search for equal rights, the portrayal of women also changed in SF giving way to the heroines like the found in contemporary SF. The importance of female authors of SF is such that, according to Adam Roberts, two of the most important figures of contemporary SF are Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler, writers that explore issues of gender and alterity (65). Robin Roberts also notes the idea "science fiction is customarily thought of as a masculine genre, although some of its most highly regarded practitioners are women" (*A New Species* 3). With the publication of novels such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* in 1975, feminist writers discovered that SF imagery provided them "with the opportunity for radical revision and reclamation" (R. Roberts, *A New Species* 40).

Another important change that has taken place in SF in the last decades is the way the genre is considered from the outside. Although SF still occupies a marginal position in the academy, and some critics are not able to see beyond the pulps and the popular character of the genre, academics such as Darko Suvin and Carl Freedman have produced several theoretical works that "have placed the genre in relation to critical theory and literary theory" (Melzer 4). This evolution in the recognition of SF literature is similar to that of SF movies. At first, most SF movies were classified as B-series, with the exception of movies such as *Metropolis* (1927). However, as in the case of SF literature, since the 1960s and 1970s some SF movies started to be acclaimed both by the public and the critics. Some significant examples of movies are *Star Wars* (1977), *Alien* (1979) or *Blade Runner* (1982), the three of

them were nominated and won several important movie awards, including the Oscar and the BAFTA awards. Nowadays the term SF has grown to include much more than fiction since it may appear related to a novel or a short story, but also to movies, television series, music, music videos, electronic games or advertising. Besides, SF characters and images have been taken over in advertising and commercial campaigns because of their appeal in mass culture. As Brooks Landon points out, even the government and the military have appropriated some SF concepts in the design of the ballistic missile defense called Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as "Star Wars" (5).

The ever-growing presence of SF is illustrative of its importance in our culture nowadays. Its success in popular culture may be precisely one of the reasons why the debate around the genre continues. The main question regarding the situation of SF in the literary canon is whether it is "popular culture or fine art" (Berger 133). Since the literary genre of SF covers everything from paperback novels of bad quality to complex novels by renowned authors such as Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Luis Borges, Doris Lessing, or Ursula Le Guin (Berger 133), it is not surprising to notice the controversial relationship between SF and literary criticism. Although some of its first practitioners—such as Jules Verne and H.G. Wells—are considered important figures of the literary tradition in general, some critics still reject SF as a literary genre worthy of consideration by academics. One of the arguments that critics have used to discredit SF as a serious genre is its escapist nature. Since SF depicts worlds different from our own, one of the main arguments against the genre is that it does not deal with real concerns.[4] Edward James admits that some SF stories and novels can only be understood as a form of entertainment "designed to fill an empty tract of time and to leave few lasting impressions" but he rejects that all SF may be put together under the same label (*Science* 96-97). Brooks Landon agrees with James' argument against classifying all SF as bad fiction when he echoes what is known as 'Sturgeon's Law'. Theodor Sturgeon, an American SF writer, believed that "the existence of immense quantities of trash in science fiction is admitted and it is regretted; but it is no more unnatural than the existence of trash anywhere" (qtd. in Landon 3). This statement implies that within any literary genre we can find both well-written works and works with a low quality, which means that "the best science fiction is as good as the best fiction in any field" (qtd. in Landon 3). With his 'law', Sturgeon recognizes that even if many SF works may be despised for not been finely written, there are other works that deserve the same attention and praise as any good realist novel or as

[4] This debate will be further developed in section 2.2.

any good poem. Other critics, as George Turner, believe that SF works cannot be despised because of belonging to a particular genre because "it is the quality of the novelist, not the genre, that determines the quality of the text" (qtd. in Berger 134). This explains why some critics have judged the genre taking B-movies and pulp fiction as the norm, while neglecting the woks by acclaimed authors such as Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, Herbert, or even Wells and Shelley (Freedman 86-87).

Although some critics believe that the 'estranged' nature of SF does not enable it to deal with real problems, Arthur Berger points out that the alternative realities portrayed in the genre do not "limit the ability of a good author to create memorable characters and first class novels" (135). However, other critics believe that the alternative worlds that appear in SF do not respond to escapism but to an innovative way of dealing with real concerns by using techniques as defamiliarization or estrangement. In fact, there are some scholars that argue that only in SF

> does fiction treat seriously the *real* problems of the present: over-population, mass unemployment, nuclear warfare, sexism, pollution, poverty, and, above all, some very basic questions which most mainstream fiction does not answer, such as 'Where does humanity go from here?' or even 'What are we all here for anyway?' (James, *Science* 96-97)

SF nowadays is a literature of ideas and an excellent vehicle for exploring real problems from an estranged point of view that defamiliarizes readers and allows them to think critically about their own reality. The issue of "what if," which is present in a vast number of SF works, involves the necessity of questioning our values and our current decisions with respect to their future results—an idea closely related to that of extrapolation, which is explored in the next section.

2.2 EXTRAPOLATION

The most important way by which SF mirrors and transforms reality is through the process of extrapolation. In general, the term extrapolation is related to the ideas of inference and prediction as a result of experience or known data. In SF, *Extrapolation* is the name of a well-known journal in the field. But, as Patrick D. Murphy, points out, extrapolation also stands for the relationship between SF and literary realism and referentiality ("Non-Alibi" 263). According to Murphy, by applying the concept of extrapolation we reach the conclusion "that the writing and reading of SF are intimately linked to and based on, getting people to think both about the present and about this world in which they live" ("Non-Alibi" 263). Through the process of estrangement, when readers face a SF text, they are invited to reflect on their own realities as observers from the perspective of an outsider, which implies that SF is not the escapist genre that some critics accuse it to be. But Patrick Murphy does not only relate SF with the real world in which readers live, but he also believes that because of extrapolation, in SF "the present and the future are interconnected—what we do now will be reflected in the future, and, therefore, we have no alibi for avoiding addressing the results of our actions today" ("Non-Alibi" 263). According to Murphy, the extrapolative character of SF implies that the genre, in spite of its futuristic or alternative settings, is based on the actual world. Besides, the present and the future appear interconnected, thus making us aware of the possible consequences of our actions today without having to wait until the future, when no solution will be possible. This last idea is very important, for example, in SF with environmental concerns since the genre becomes a vehicle to warn readers about the future consequences of our behavior towards nature as well as to hint at solutions for problems that may not yet exist but that may be the result of present events.

Although SF has always been seen as futuristic since many SF stories and movies depict futuristic worlds, SF authors and critics agree on the fact that what the genre is concerned about is the present and how the present may affect the future. For example, Brian Aldiss compares the genre with the contemporary novel and he points out that whereas the contemporary novel is about the results of past events in the present, "science fiction rides the crest of the wave of social and scientific thought, extrapolating the Now" (Aldiss 286). Sherryl Vint also believes that even if SF is set in the future or in another planet, "science fiction is commonly understood to be about the moment contemporary to its production, the anxieties and anticipations that form that moment" (22). Adam Roberts establishes an even

greater relationship between SF and the present since he states that the genre does not take us into the future because it tells us about the present, and about the past that has resulted in our present (19). Similarly, Jenny Wolmark quotes French philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard's idea that "the role of science fiction has shifted from that of imagining multiple and expansive possible future possibilities, to that of simply reflecting back to us the hyperreality in which we already live" (qtd. in "Time" 159).

One of the main implications of the extrapolative nature of SF is that the genre is concerned about the present situation of our world. Although the genre portrays different realities from our own, these scenarios may be interpreted as mirrors of our world. For Patrick Parrinder, these mirrors do not only reflect the real world but they can be considered "a source of active commentary upon society and its attitudes" (*Science* 30). Also Darko Suvin believes that SF mirrors the author's environment while at the same time provokes some critical thinking:

> Significant SF is in fact a specifically roundabout way of commenting on the author's collective context—often resulting in a surprisingly concrete and sharp-sighted comment at that. Even where SF suggests—sometimes strongly—a flight from that context, this is an optical illusion and epistemological trick. The escape is, in all such significant SF, one to a better vantage point from which to comprehend the human relations around the author. It is an escape from constrictive old norms into a different and alternative timestream, a device for historical estrangement, and an at least initial readiness for new norms of reality, for the novum of dealienating human history. (84)

As Suvin states, SF is about the real word observed from an estranged point of view, which allows us to comment on it more critically because of the process of defamiliarization that results from the *novum*. Besides, since SF has no limitations or constraints, in contrast with naturalistic fiction, writers can explore current problems and concerns freely. That is the reason why since the 1960s many writers have been using SF to deal with social issues such as racism, sexism or environmental degradation.

In the 1950s, SF as a mode of social criticism became an issue in the magazines, the most popular way of SF publishing. As a response to the "militarization of science" that took place during and after World War II and the atmosphere lived in the McCarthy period, many SF authors chose for their stories themes related to the threats posed by new technological developments (Parrinder 71). However, as early as the last decade of the 19th century, one of the first important figures of the genre had already used SF conventions to deal with the concerns of his days. Although *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells depicts an alien invasion of the Earth, portraying the aliens as evil creatures, these characters have a symbolic meaning: the Martian invasion of the Earth is a metaphor to explore Well's concerns about

the British Empire. Thus, by describing the suffering of the humans fighting against the Martians he was criticizing the "violence of empire-building" and exploring "the anxieties of otherness and the encounter with otherness that empire imposes on the imperial peoples" (A. Roberts 48).

Following the example of Wells's Martians, many alien invasions and abductions in SF can be interpreted as symbolic representations of the slave trade and of colonization. In the case of alien abduction, the idea of being dragged from one's home, being subjected to physical humiliation and to violence and sexual assault, and being taking by force into a spaceship resembles all too much the experience of African people carried in boats to America and to Europe to become slaves (A. Roberts 106). The two novels under analysis in this dissertation are illustrative of this interpretation of alien abductions and colonization. On the one hand, Buttler's *Xenogenesis* series tells the story of a group of humans rescued by an alien civilization and treated in a rather paternalistic way. On the other hand, Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* depicts the violent invasion of a planet whose inhabitants resist in a non-violent way. According to Patricia Melzer, the interesting aspect of the extrapolation of colonialism and slavery through images of space travels and alien invasions is that these texts reach "a diverse audience often not included in theoretical debates on anticolonial identities" (Melzer 37).

Apart from these examples of how SF works may be quite critical with social issues such as colonialism, slavery or imperialism, there is a large group of writers whose works criticize totalitarian regimes and other oppressive situations, especially by means of a dystopia. For example, Both Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984* criticize extremist political and social movements that start being ideal to later become a nightmare for the protagonists because they are based on authoritarianism and on the total control of the population. This way, Orwell's *1984* is a clear criticism of totalitarian regimes whose ideals became corrupted once in power. Then, this type of novel does not only work as criticism but also as a warning about what may happen, about the possibilities to be avoided (Talbot 168). With these examples, among others, we can conclude that even though SF is an 'estranged' genre, it is based on reality while, at the same time, it makes readers reflect on their reality. As Murphy explains in his definition of the term extrapolation, SF is about the world in which we live and about the future we may face if we do not solve our problems nowadays. Therefore, SF is not necessarily escapist; instead, it observes reality from a distant point of view which allows us to analyze our world in a defamiliarized and more objective way.

2.3 SF AND POSTMODERNISM

In the previous section we have analyzed how some critics have dismissed SF for its alleged escapist nature. However, SF critics and authors have shown that because of the extrapolative nature of the genre, SF is concerned with the real world, thus functioning as a mirror of our world. This section will explore another reason for critical neglect, while also including how SF critics has responded to this critique. Apart from being dismissed as an escapist genre, SF has also been classified as a popular genre with a pejorative connotation. In his book *Science Fiction,* Adam Roberts points out some of the reasons why SF has been classified as popular fiction without taking into account individual works within the genre. For example, he states that SF does not conform to what readers expect from serious modes of writing because in SF readers do not usually find "beautiful or experimental writing styles, detailed and subtle analyses of character or psychological analyses" (13-14). As Adam Roberts explains a bit later, SF is "more interested in 'object' than subject," so SF authors have tended to focus their skills on the plot of their stories instead of developing characters and experimenting with narrative techniques.

According to Brian McHale, in the 1950s SF writers started experimenting with their styles whereas certain mainstream writers adopted SF images and themes (McHale, *Constructing* 228). These writers, in spite of their debt to the neglected genre of SF, did not always recognize their borrowing, and McHale presumes this was because of "the 'low art' stigma" that was attached to science fiction for a long time (*Postmodernism* 65). However, these were only incipient attempts of interaction between SF and mainstream fiction. In 1960s SF was going through the period known as New Wave and it was at that moment, according to Brian McHale, when the "interaction between SF and advanced or state-of-the-art mainstream fiction" began to take place (*Constructing* 228). By the 1970s SF and postmodernist fiction became contemporaries both "aesthetically as well as chronologically" (McHale, *Constructing* 228). A good example of the interaction between SF and postmodernism is Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), in which the author mixes his reflection on writing the novel with both real events—such as the bombing of Dresden during World War II—and SF motifs—like an alien abduction.

One of the main characteristics of postmodernism is its rejection of the distinction between 'high' and 'low' art, something that modernists had considered important in previous decades (Barry 84). Postmodernism also supports the transgression of the boundaries between

genres, disciplines or discourses (Hutcheon 18-19). As Jenny Wolmark states, since postmodernism supports the blurring of traditional limits among genres, it becomes difficult to classify works within high or popular culture, something that can be also applied to SF (Wolmark *Aliens* 6). In general, postmodernism rejects established categories and proposes new ones based on duplicity and ambiguity. For example, as Linda Hutcheon states, one of the concerns of postmodernism is "to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us" (2). As Darren Jorgensen adds, postmodernist critics want to "dismantle those hierarchies that privileged some cultural traditions over others" (279). By referring to the cultural traditions that had been privileged, Jorgensen refers to modernism, which was identified with "male, Eurocentric, and imperialist creative production" (279). Many scholars challenged modernism because they did not consider that it described universal experiences and in so doing, they undermined assumptions by favoring "the marginal, the fragmentary, and the heterogeneous" (Freedman 182). Similarly, and more or less at the same time, the social groups that had been long neglected realized that SF was an adequate vehicle to explore the idea of otherness and to present their concerns for alternative societies.

One of the ways in which both SF and postmodernism challenge presupposed assumptions and propose alternatives is by portraying futuristic settings. According to McHale, postmodernist writings dealing with future worlds usually "focus on social and institutional innovations" whereas SF texts tend to focus on the "technological innovations that are stereotypically associated with science fiction" (*Postmodernism* 66). McHale points out Samuel Delaney's novel *Triton* (1976)—later published as *Trouble on Triton*—as an example of how SF and postmodernist concerns can work together. In *Triton* there is a mixture of SF motifs, such as that of visiting an alien planet, and SF imagery with the ideas that interest postmodernists, that is, "social and institutional extrapolations: living arrangements, norms of sexual behavior, religious cults, even future art-forms and boardgames" (*Postmodernism* 70-71). In his postmodernist analysis of SF, Brian McHale also posits that in spite of their different concerns, SF and postmodernist writings both tend to describe futuristic worlds as "grim dystopias" that result from some type of holocaust or of apocalypsis (*Postmodernism* 67). However, other critics such as Robin Roberts reject McHale's statements concerning futuristic worlds. R. Roberts claims that McHale's assumptions regarding futuristic SF writings are only based on those written by male authors. She goes on qualifying McHale's assessment as inaccurate because he does not take into

account feminist postmodern science fiction, which usually "contains worlds that are optimistic, disruptive, and contradictory" (R. Roberts, "Post-Modernism" 139). Feminist futuristic utopias are usually characterized by respectful attitudes towards otherness and towards the environment; they could be called optimistic in the sense that they present alternative lifestyles to those we find in patriarchal societies. Patricia Waugh offers the example of the utopias by Doris Lessing, Joanna Russ or Marge Piercy to illustrate how by dissolving "the unequal boundaries of gender" they are able to portray the image of a new and better society (169-70).

During the 60s and 70s, with the incorporation of SF writers whose main concern were issues of gender and difference, and with the influence of "the postmodern erosion of boundaries between high and popular culture", the genre of SF became "a terrain for the ideological contestation of the politics of gender" (Wolmark, *Aliens* 2). The beginning of postmodernism coincided with the women's liberation movement—as well as with the New Wave in SF. Both postmodernism and feminism celebrate the popular, the disruption of traditional boundaries of gender or high and popular culture, and "the confounding of traditional markers of 'difference'" (Waugh 4). Feminist SF writers also found postmodernism interesting because its critique of accepted presumptions entailed the critique of patriarchy, and patriarchy was precisely what feminist writers usually challenged in their works (R. Roberts, "Post-Modernism" 136). Thus, feminist SF writers found there were many similarities between their discourses and those of postmodernism, especially the blurring of boundaries between literary genres and between high/low art, and the multiplicity of voices.

One of the ways in which feminist writers make use of SF and postmodernist devices is by challenging the "hierarchical structures embedded in language" (R. Roberts, "Post-Modernism" 141) since they believe that the language we use promotes gender inequality and patriarchy. Though some postmodern techniques have been appropriated by feminist writers, there are some controversial principles in postmodern theory with which feminists do not agree. One of the main points of controversy is the conceptualization of the postmodern subject. Postmodernists talk about the "death of the subject" since they conceive the subject as a fragmented and dislocated one, and some feminists use this image "as a potential for resistance and political empowerment, not despair" (Melzer 16). However, other feminists talk about multiplicity rather than fragmentation since they prefer the image of a flexible and fluid self rather than a scattered one (Melzer 16). Feminists did not think that postmodernism brought them the possibility to express themselves, since they had become just one more voice within the multiplicity of voices that postmodernism promulgated (Jorgensen 282). It is

precisely through this multiplicity of voices and this fluid construction of the subject that feminist writers have been able to deconstruct gender identities to challenge patriarchy.

2.4 FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION

Although SF has for many decades been criticized for its "sexism and antifeminist bias" (Bradley 26), since the 1960s, when the so called Second Wave of Feminism took place, many women writers started to realize the potential of SF for exploring gender issues (Merrick 241; Melzer 2). In fact, as Adam Roberts comments, "one of the most notable features of contemporary SF is how high a proportion of the best writers working in the field use the idiom to interrogate the logic of 'gender'" (71). There are numerous SF writers that in recent years have explored gender relations and gender alternatives, for example: Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), James Tiptree, Jr.[5]'s short stories "The Girl who was Plugged In" (1973) and "Houston, Houston, Do you Read?" (1976), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Samuel Delaney's novel *Trouble on Triton* (1976), Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) or Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991)—published as *Body of Glass* outside the United States. Most of the works exploring gender issues are concerned with women's roles and women's situation in society, portraying civilizations in which women are not constrained by patriarchal attitudes and can thus "imagine presently impossible possibilities for women" (Barr, *Alien* xi). This type of novel has been labeled as feminist SF and it is representative of many of most important innovations in the genre of SF in general.

Before exploring feminist SF, we first need to define how feminism is conceived by SF authors, and Veronica Hollinger's article "Feminist Theory and Science Fiction" provides a clear definition: "feminism works to achieve social justice for women. It aims to render obsolete the patriarchal order whose hegemony has meant inequality and oppression for women as *Others* to men. In other words, feminism desires nothing less than to change the world" ("Feminist"126). Then, when we classify a work as feminist SF it is because it explores an alternative social system where women are not subjugated because of their gender. According to some authors, feminist SF is "written in the interests of women" because it allows writers to propose alternative societies; and these alternative worlds and projects may encourage people to make them possible by "undertaking the cultural and social transformations that are the aims of the feminist political enterprise" (Hollinger, "Feminist"128).

[5] James Tiptree Jr. was the authorial persona of the writer Alice Sheldon. When she revealed she was a woman, she helped to "break down the false boundaries between men's writing and women's writing in science fiction" (Booker and Thomas 96).

Although some female SF writers had established their careers before the emergence of feminist SF during the 1960s and 1970s—C.L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, Katharine MacLean, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Margaret St. Clair, and Andre Norton (Landon 125)—, the "feminist" revolution in SF is a relatively new phenomenon since one of the predominant criticisms of SF is that it has been male-oriented. During the "Golden Age" of SF, the genre was preeminently male since it was created and consumed by young men. As a male-oriented kind of literature, the genre satisfied male expectations such as "gleaming machines […], war, two-dimensional male heroes, adventure and excitement" (A. Roberts 72). Therefore, issues that women writers of SF would develop years later, such as gender and sexual roles, had no place during these decades.

Another important feature of the '"Golden Age" of SF is that "most characters, whether male or female, were no more than stereotypes" (Cioffi 84), particularly in the case of female characters. They were portrayed as flat stereotypes in a secondary position playing "supporting roles as the 'other' of men" (Hollinger, "Feminist"126). On the one hand we could find women that could be described as "virtuous" or "dullards" (Lefanu 26) and whose role was that of accompanying the male hero. On the other hand readers could find "evil, sexy alien queens" that had some independence and fun before "being tamed by love or exterminated" (Lefanu, *Chinks* 26). Ursula Le Guin in her article "American SF and the Other" describes ironically the possibilities for female characters in SF "as squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters—or old-maid scientists de-sexed by hypertrophy of the intellectual organs—or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes" ("American" 208).

However, during the 1960s and 1970s this situation changed. During these two decades there were several social movements that challenged traditional attitudes, laws and institutions, looking for a more egalitarian society for those considered the *other*—for example, ethnic minorities, women or nature. In the case of SF, many of the works written during these decades portrayed the general anxiety of the cold war and the dangers of science and technology in the wrong hands; but there was also a new group of writers who used SF to criticize patriarchy by exploring gender issues (Wolmark, "Time" 158). As Sarah Lefanu points out, Joanna Russ was one of the first writers to realize the huge potential of SF to redefine gender roles both in her fiction and in her critical work (13). Her most popular novel is *The Female Man* (1975) and it is about four different women who live at different times of history and in different places. The four women show how womanhood and gender roles are understood differently in their respective realities. What Joanna Russ does in this novel is to

offer the same character—in fact the four protagonists' names start by the letter "j"—but in different moments of history so that at the end the reader has a general idea of what it means to be a woman.

During the 1970s, with the appearance of women SF writers, the representation of female characters in the genre also changed. Women characters started to be developed in more complex ways moving from the flat characterization of decades before, to become protagonists and heroines of their own stories. This could be seen in one of the important moments in the history of feminist SF with the publication of the anthology *Women of Wonder* by Pamela Sargent in 1975. This anthology consists of a collection of SF short stories written by women and with a clearly feminist tone. For the SF audience, the publication of this book showed the importance of the emergent feminist wave within the genre, but also that these feminist SF writers were "now doing much of the genre's best and most exciting work" (Landon 126). This anthology was followed by other volumes also edited by Pamela Sargent: *More Women of Wonder* (1976), *The New Women of Wonder* (1978), *Women of Wonder: The Classic Years: Science Fiction by Women from the 1940s to the 1970s* (1996) or *Women of Wonder: The Contemporary Years: Science Fiction by Women from the 1970s to the 1990s* (1996). These numerous volumes, as well as all the other novels and short stories published by feminist SF writers can give an idea of the great contribution of feminism to SF. In fact, the relationship between SF and feminism has been so profitably rewarding that it is sometimes considered "the most important single development in SF since the 1970s" (Landon 124). The list of feminist SF writers is a large one—and many names have already been mentioned—but it is also worthwhile to consider mainstream authors who have contributed to SF with relevant novels: Marge Piercy's *Women on the Edge of Time* (1976) and *He, She and It* (1991); Doris Lessing's series *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979-1983); Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), and *The Year of the Flood* (2009); and Rosa Montero's *Lágrimas en la Lluvia* (2011).

The classification of SF as a popular genre may be considered a deterrent for those who want their voices to be heard after years of having been rejected by the canon—mainly ethnic minorities and women. But popular genres also enjoy a privileged position if we consider their large readerships, which encourage writers to use these genres to express their dissatisfaction and to make readers question certain given attitudes, values or actions. Therefore, for feminist writers SF became a vehicle to express their criticism against patriarchy and to denounce gender inequality. But feminist writers also chose SF because of its lack of constraints. In SF there are no rules regarding time and space, thus enabling authors

to subvert traditional institutions and social systems in order to propose alternatives to our own lifestyle. After centuries of patriarchal oppression, women could design their own worlds or, as Robin Roberts posists: "only in science fiction can feminists imaginatively step outside the father's house and begin to look around" (*A New Species* 2). Marleen Barr is another critic who believes that SF can work as a guide for women to reimagine the world. For her, "reality is made of words" so women must try to write their own stories, "to nurture their own definitions" (Barr, "Feminist" 146). Barr also points out that by creating feminist SF works with non-patriarchal societies, feminist writers may encourage the audience to question patriarchal laws and institutions and imagine "a social revolution directed toward changing patriarchy" (Barr, "Feminist" 144) and changing the place of women in the world (Barr, *Alien* xxi).

One would think that realism is a more suitable genre to explore women's oppression because it is closer to reality and to real problems. However, the problem of realism is that it imposes on women writers the same patriarchal framework that underlies Western societies, whereas SF can "offer enormous scope to women writers who are thus released from the constraints of realism" (Lefanu 21-22). For this reason, SF was chosen by many women writers as a vehicle for dealing with the deconstruction of gender, because "SF provides a wider range of possibilities that women writers can use to criticize patriarchy" (R. Roberts, "Post-Modernism"137). By making use of SF devices feminist writers are able to explore power relations by creating new societies and cultures that have nothing to do with reality (Melzer 5). Therefore, as Patricia Melzer points out, aliens and distant planets help writers to put into practice feminist ideals that have no place in patriarchy. This way, theory, imagination and activism can work together in this type of novels which "function as 'case studies' of how feminist theories 'work'" (Melzer 11).

Many SF writers have also used the genre to speculate on woman's role in society by placing the female character as the heroine of the story, even if at the time most women were still relegated to a secondary position in social structures. Thus, although "women's lives are restricted on earth" by making them heroines they can travel through time and space realizing their potential (Lefanu 27). In so doing, these heroines can become the inspiration for women who are willing to discover their potential; as Marleen Barr points out, "speculative fiction stresses that women's liberating fictive dreams can influence women's repressive sexist reality" (Barr, *Alien* 155). Therefore, SF is considered an adequate vehicle for writers to explore issues of gender such as sexual hierarchies or patriarchal attitudes, as well as other oppressive behaviors. By going beyond the limits of reality, SF offers the possibility of

proposing futures to our own present. Because these futures are indeterminate, some feminist SF writers have used them to portray an alternative world to the one they live in, with special interest in the role of women and their situation in society. An example would be Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, in which we do not only see the past and the present of the time when Russ was writing but also a distant future in Whileaway, a country without men. Most of the writings of feminist SF writers explore their concerns about the link between oppression and difference by portraying worlds based on "plurality and inclusion" (Wolmark "Time" 161). This way, these writers show that an alternative society is possible if we change the values that shape our conceptual framework. By portraying societies in which no individual is oppressed on the grounds of gender, feminist SF authors may imply that the future is open for us to write it.

2.4.1 Feminist utopias

One of the ways chosen by feminist SF authors to portray alternative worlds is that of a utopia. In a general sense, utopia stands for "the fictional representation of an ideal place, somewhere that is 'better' than the society or the world in which we actually live […] a realm like the unconscious, where dreams may flourish and desires be realized" (Lefanu 53). This way, utopias allow feminist writers to create "a separate space for women" where "myths about mothering" and "qualities identified as feminine" are valorized (R. Roberts, *A New Species* 66). Moreover, reading a feminist utopia also enables readers to remove themselves "from the setting of patriarchal society and its suppositions" (R. Roberts, *A New Species* 67) and to imagine a different world where women are not constrained by reality and where they can explore their identity without patriarchal impositions.

Feminist utopias are usually based on the single-gender societies that have existed throughout history. Perhaps the best well-known example of this type of society is that of the amazons that appear in Greek mythology—although there have also been accounts of their existence in Roman historiography. Amazons were described as woman warriors, the same description that Francisco de Orellana provided for a society of women that inhabited the area of the Amazon River back in the 15th century. In spite of the long history of female societies, it was not until 1880-81 that the first feminist utopia in literature written in English appeared: *Mizora: A Prophecy*. *Mizora* appeared serially in a Cincinnati newspaper, only to become published in novel form in 1890. Although there is not much information about the author,

Mary E. Bradley Lane, it has been supposed that she was familiar with *Frankenstein* and that this novel had a great influence on Lane (R. Roberts, *A New Species* 70). *Mizora* tells the story of Vera, a woman who travels to the Artic in order to escape from Russia. Close to the North Pole she finds *Mizora,* a society of Aryan women who are presented as "mistresses of science" (R. Roberts, *A New Species* 72) and who are able to reproduce without men thanks to the process known as parthenogenesis. Although there are some racist elements in the Mizoran society and its eugenics, the dark-haired Vera is accepted into Mizora before she departs to go back with her husband and her son, thus returning to her traditional role of wife and mother. This ending may be surprising from a feminist point of view, but we need to take into account that the novel was written in the Victorian era, when most women were quite limited in their life choices. The novel *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is better known than *Mizora*. In this novel, a group of male explorers arrive to a country inhabited only by women who, as Mizorans, are able to reproduce through parthenogenesis. The explorers get to know the lifestyle of Herland, where feminine values are highly appreciated and where motherhood has become a communal experience. One of the interesting aspects of these novels is that there is no mention of sexual intercourse or of love relationships among same-sex individuals.

After the publication of *Mizora* and *Herland*, it was not until the 1970s when feminist utopias became widely used by feminist SF writers. This significant delay between *Mizora* and similar works may be related to the historical moment the Western world was experiencing with the two War Worlds, and the later emphasis on the image of the traditional woman in the 1950s. Then, in the 1970s, the plot of the feminist utopia was re-written to give place to two different types of feminist utopias. Critics like Jane Donawerth classify feminist utopias in two groups: on the one hand we find "the separatist lesbian utopia" (94), represented by Joanna Russ's Whileaway country in *The Female Man* (1975), Sally Miller Gearhart's Hillwomen in *The Wanderground* (1979), and Katherin V. Forrest's Maternas in *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984); and, on the other hand, we find the feminist utopia that "accommodates a range of sexualities but generally takes as norm bisexuality" (Donawerth 94). Examples of this second type of feminist utopia are Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Marion Zimmer Bradley's Amazons in *The Shattered Chain* (1976), *Thendara House* (1983) and *City of Sorcery* (1984) and Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988). Most of the novels listed above portray worlds in which heterosexuality is not the norm, so alternative ways of reproduction are used—for instance, artificial insemination—thus liberating women from heterosexual relationships and

facilitating "a more equitable distribution of childcare among all members of the community" (Donawerth 15).

Many feminist utopias, such as *Mizora* or *Herland*, analyze what happens when an outsider makes contact with the utopia, resulting in a clash between two completely different lifestyles. Usually, male outsiders realize patriarchy is not the only organizational pattern for a society and that these female utopias tend to live in a more healthy and peaceful way. In Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women*, the author presents a female society that lives in harmony with nature and who reproduce without men, who in turn are excluded from that life and confined to the cities. In Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, once boys reach adolescence they leave the matriarchy of the gated city to live among other men following a militaristic lifestyle. Years later, when they are given the choice to return to the matriarchy some of them decide to do so and follow women's rules. The interesting aspect is that within the gated city women carry out experiments to breed men who reject patriarchal values for a more egalitarian society. Then, although the women in this novel have heterosexual relationships, reproduction is through artificial insemination. In contrast to the previous works, there are other feminist utopias in which men do not appear at all: for example, the country of Whileaway in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, where all men have died because of a disease that only affected them. There is a third type of feminist utopia such as Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* and *Motherlines* and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, in which reproduction is performed in tanks and child rearing is considered a communal task shared by both women and men.

Feminist utopias usually challenge patriarchy by blaming it for the apocalypse or catastrophe that sometimes works as the starting point of these utopias. In these cases, patriarchal values and attitudes are considered to have "compromised the integrity of the earth and its inhabitants by making choices that, though technically and scientifically sound, are nonetheless life-threatening, environment-threatening, and psyche-threatening" (Caldwell 59). This way, many of these novels open with a huge disaster that allows humanity to start again, thus criticizing "patriarchal society and imagining something different" (Lefanu 89). For example, Octavia Butler in *Dawn* describes a nuclear war that has devastated the Earth and most species including human beings. *Motherlines*, by Charnas, is also set in a "postapocalyptic Earth to emphasize male mismanagement that has destroyed the Earth through nuclear catastrophe" (R. Roberts, *A New Species* 83). In *Dreamsnake*, Vonda McIntyre also uses the convention of nuclear devastation in order to deal with themes such as the abuse of technology and the issue of the *other* (Lefanu 89). With the building of a new

society based on respect and peace, women become bearers of hope in a world that has nothing to lose and that is open for alternative lifestyles.

These utopian societies have similar characteristics that derive from their rejection of patriarchy and the emphasis on female values. Among these common features we can point out that women in feminist utopias tend to form very strong and united groups in which the community is placed over the individual. Besides, government and political decisions are usually taken in an informal atmosphere and by reaching a consensus after all voices have been heard. Since feminine values are placed over masculine ones, patience, care and respect are at the core of these women's relationship with the *other*, so there is no place for violent behaviors. Another interesting aspect of these societies is that sex is not linked to reproduction and child-bearing, so these women are able to explore their sexuality without constraints (Lefanu 54). Some of these utopias pay special attention to the wellbeing of the natural world. For Lefanu, the use of the disaster convention as the beginning of a work is not only the adequate background for the starting of a new lifestyle based on female values; it can also be considered a warning about the consequences of our behavior regarding nature (90).

One of the problems that we find in some feminist utopias is that their essentialism is highly controversial. By emphasizing feminine values authors may be criticized for simply repeating the same hierarchical pattern that has placed men over women in patriarchal societies. For these reasons, some authors prefer to avoid feminist utopias when exploring gender conflicts. For example, Robin Roberts posits that feminist SF "has more room for ambiguity and difference" (*A New Species* 91) and that it "rejects the essentialism and simplicity of the feminist utopian strategy" (*A New Species* 87). Thus, feminist utopias are not always adequate to explore gender since they do not always portray how male and female individuals can interact in alternative ways to those of patriarchy. In fact, some of these women-only communities tend "to reproduce those patriarchal ways of thinking that they set out to critique because they rely on non-problematised notions of gender" (Wolmark, *Aliens* 82). In this sense, Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* is an interesting novel because, although it portrays a feminist utopia, we can see how male characters also play an important role in the sense that they can choose which set of values they prefer—as in Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*— if those of patriarchy or those of the female society. For critics like Robin Roberts, feminist SF is better than the feminist utopia in order to point out the advantages of a non-sexist society since this type of SF show readers "the benefits to men and women of sexual equality" (*A New Species* 92), and in order to do so it is necessary to portray

the relationships of male and female characters, rather than focusing on a all-female society as in most feminist utopias.

Whether we talk about feminist utopias or feminist SF in general, there is no doubt that SF has proved adequate to explore gender concerns and challenge patriarchy. But feminist SF writers have not only explored gender oppression, but they have widened their scope to encompass other types of oppression related to that based on gender because the genre is open to explore "representations of difference and diversity" (Hollinger, "Feminist"127-8). For instance, SF has not only helped feminists to propose alternative futures in which gender is not a handicap any more, the genre has also allied with queer theory in order to offer a "dystopian view of the present and a utopian hope for the future, a hope that it will be, at the very least, a place where we do not automatically kill what is different" (Pearson 159). Similarly, the exploitation of nature has also been one of the major themes in feminist SF by exploring how natural catastrophes may be avoided by having a healthier relationship with the environment. In conclusion, alterity and otherness have been common issues in SF since its beginnings, and creatures such as the alien or the robot have always represented human's fears towards what is different, the *other*.

Considering the SF tropes that represent alterity—aliens, cyborgs or robots—one can appreciate the special relationship between female characters and SF monsters. In pulp fiction this association also exists but with negative connotations, since the female characters that appeared more developed were alien queens or witches that represented evil. However, in recent SF women and monsters have become allies in the fight against fixed oppressive conceptual frameworks such as patriarchy. In fact, "the affinity between aliens and women and aliens and "monsters" has been noted so frequently as to have become something of a commonplace" (Landon 126). But some feminist SF writers consider that the relationship of aliens and women is also interesting for other oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities, or animals and the natural world. As Marleen Barr points out in *Alien to Femininity*, "hope lies with the political struggles of women together with all the other oppressed socioeconomic groups" (xviii). Similarly, ecofeminism—whose main principles will be developed later in this dissertation—also defends that the interests of all those labeled as the *other* are intertwined in such a way that the liberation of nature can only be achieved together with the liberation of women. Ecofeminism and feminist SF also share a common aim: that of denouncing oppression and its consequences while also proposing alternatives: "science fiction enables women writers to criticize the past as well as provide for the future" (R. Roberts, *A New Species* 13). Robin Roberts is one of those critics who recognizes the

possibilities of feminist SF to envision alternative realities in which men and women are able to succeed in creating "a nonsexist, nonracist, nonclassist society" (*A New Species* 87). One way in which SF enables writers to create those ideal societies Robin Roberts refers to is through an alien civilization.

2.5 ALIENS AND CYBORGS

The alien is one of the most common characters used in feminist SF in order to portray alternatives to patriarchy and to the Western cultural paradigm. The two authors whose work is analyzed in this dissertation, Joan Slonczewski and Octavia Butler, make use of the alien to question traditional definitions regarding identity, gender and otherness. Both in Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy and in Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean,* the boundary between what it means to be human and what it means to be an alien is blurred, thus inviting readers to question fixed categories regarding humanity and otherness. The idea of otherness has always been present in SF since the genre "has always been concerned with exploring the Alien, the Not Self, the Other" (Griffith n.p.). In the book *Alien Constructions* Patricia Melzer talks about the un-human characters that appear in SF, differentiating several sub groups (70). First, she mentions cyborgs, creatures that result from the mixture of organic and inorganic materials; then, she refers to artificial intelligence and to thinking computers and androids; lastly, she points out the figure of the doppelganger as "a nonmaterial apparition that is physically explicable" (70). Regarding the dualism human/*other*, Christine Cornea posits that throughout its history, SF has explored "ideas about human subjectivity and identity" by establishing "a comparison between self (human) and Other (non-human) characters" (275). By opposing humans to non-human characters such as aliens, SF writers have explored the concept of identity and have dealt with the anxieties and conflicts that otherness arouses in our society.

The issue of otherness has been analyzed in detail not only in literature but also in philosophy and cultural studies. Most of the authors that have studied the idea of otherness coincide in the idea that the *other* is inevitably linked with the self. Tzvetan Todorov states that "it is impossible to conceive of any being outside of the relations that link it to the other" (94), that "we can never see ourselves as a whole; the *other* is necessary to accomplish, even if temporarily, a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself" (95). Pathattricia Melzer also comments the self has no identity on its own if it is not opposed to the *other*; so we need the *other* to define the self because "the traditional self is constituted through the notion of otherness" (14). But the problem with the treatment of otherness is that in dualistic thinking those described as the *other* often occupy a subjugated position in relation to those considered the self. Regarding this idea, SF writer Ursula K. Le Guin writes:

> If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself—as men have done to women, and class has done to class, and nation has done to nation—you may hate it, or deify it; but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality, and its human reality. You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship. And thus you have fatally impoverished your own reality. You have, in fact, alienated yourself. (Le Guin, "American SF" n.p.)

Otherness usually entails some kind of power-over relation, placing the so called *others* in an inferior position justified by their difference. As Le Guin states, by erasing otherness from our reality we are not improving our world but instead we are impoverishing it. Then, the self alienates itself becoming the *other* by not recognizing its own otherness.

Postcolonial authors have also studied the concept of otherness in relation to colonization. For example, for Homi Bhabha the *other* "is at once an object of desire and derision" (67), something that defines the self while opposing it at the same time. This ambiguity which is at the base of the relationship of self and *other* has been deeply explored in postcolonialism since otherness in terms of race and culture has been used to "justify conquest" (Bhabha 70) and the oppression of the colonized by the colonizers. In a similar way to postcolonial writers, feminist writers have tried to recuperate the marginalized by "subverting patriarchal forms" (Singh and Schmidt 32). So feminist SF writers have made use of traditionally male images in SF to rewrite the genre following a more egalitarian portrayal of real or imagined worlds. Besides, just as postcolonialism does, feminism and feminist SF do not only focus on the treatment of the *other*, but they also celebrate hybridity and conceive otherness as a source "of energy and potential change" (Barry 198).

Issues of otherness, colonization and oppression have been explored in SF for decades. SF writers have made use of SF imagery in order to analyze how identity is built while portraying otherness as a way to define humanity: "the aliens—utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers—are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world" (Suvin 5). Aliens, robots, cyborgs and other SF characters mirror human society and how this society interprets and understands otherness. This is the reason why some critics define the genre of SF as "the encounter with difference" (A. Roberts 17). In SF, this difference has been presented in a symbolic way and encoded in the very nature of the genre, what Darko Suvin referred to as *novum*. The *nova*—all that makes SF apparently far from reality in terms of characters or settings—are more than a set of "gimmicks" or "clichés," as Robert Adams states in *Science Fiction*, "they provide a symbolic grammar for articulating the perspectives of normally marginalized discourses of race, of gender, of non-conformism and alternative ideologies" (17). Thus SF forces readers to interpret its symbolic language, and recognize

"the marginal experience coded through the discourses of material symbolism" which make it possible for SF authors to explore otherness not through realism or actual representations of our world, but "by figuratively symbolizing it" (A. Roberts 19).

It is precisely through this symbolic language of SF that difference and otherness are understood. The "encounter of difference" that Adam Roberts (17) refers to is more interesting when otherness is represented by characters that clearly resemble human beings physically and/or psychologically (A. Roberts 94). These human-like characters help writers to explore racist and xenophobic attitudes as well as alternative and respectful reactions towards difference. In spite of the great potential of SF for exploring issues of otherness, Elizabeth Anne Leonard states that SF criticism has not yet paid much "attention to the treatment of issues relating to race and ethnicity" (253). However, there are some exceptions to this and one of the best examples is the American SF writer Samuel Delaney, whose novels have received several awards and nominations. Delaney, doubly alienated as an African American and gay writer, uses SF to invite the reader to reflect on issues of race and difference without imposing a fixed set of beliefs and conceptions regarding otherness (A. Roberts 98). As the critic Damian Broderick states, Delaney uses the genre "to confound prejudice and illuminate otherness" ("New Wave" 59). Samuel Delaney was also a mentor for one of the authors studied in this dissertation, Octavia Butler. The similarities between Delaney and Butler go beyond their shared African origin, since Butler also makes of otherness and difference one of the main issues in her novels. As Jenny Wolmark exposes in her book *Aliens and Others*, Butler's fiction "is about identity and the dimensions of the 'other'" and her novels usually focus on power relations based on difference and on "the transgression of boundaries" (*Aliens* 29). These two writers, among others, demonstrate how SF becomes "a vehicle for the representation of cultural perspectives that differ from the white, male, middle-class mainstream of Western culture" (Booker and Thomas 126).

But SF imagery has not only been used by some authors to explore difference in terms of race and ethnicity. As it was explained before, since the 1960s and 1970s feminist SF has become one of the most prominent branches of the genre. Many feminist authors rewrite the traditional evil character of the alien or the cyborg in order "to explore the perspectives and experiences of hegemonic culture's traditional 'others'" (Hollinger, "Feminist Theory" 132). The two authors studied in this dissertation, Octavia Butler and Joan Slonczewski, are two good examples of how the boundary between human and alien can be questioned. In their works, these authors portray alien civilizations that confront patriarchy and other oppressive

attitudes while at the same time praise difference and recognize otherness as something positive.

In recent SF, aliens, robots and other un-human SF characters work as metaphors to deconstruct difference and they reflect "cultural anxieties about a range of 'Others'" (Merrick 241). One of the most interesting features of traditional SF characters such as the alien, the cyborg or the robot is how they trespass boundaries. Usually, these creatures cannot be classified as female or male, and sometimes it is even difficult to describe them as machines because they show organic components and human feelings. These creatures thus threaten traditional dualisms such as "the masculine/feminine dualism that establishes a self/other relationship based on sexual difference" (Melzer 14). This is the reason why many feminist SF writers use the imagery of the genre in order to challenge binary oppositions such as the male/female one that has traditionally relegated women to a second position. For example, Octavia Butler and Gwyneth Jones are two of the authors that use the alien "to explore the way in which the deeply divisive dichotomies of race and gender are embedded in the repressive structures and relations of dominance and subordination" (Wolmark, *Aliens* 27).

Although the focus of this dissertation is on the figure of the alien, it is important to take into account how other SF figures have been used as metaphors for different human concerns. One of these figures is the robot, a type of man-made machine with autonomous behavior, to some extent. The term robot was coined by the Czech author Karel Čapek in his play *R.U.R.* (1921), and it refers back to the Czech word *robota*, which is related to the concept of servitude. The play *R.U.R.* is about exploitation and about the rebellion of the exploited people against their oppressors. But one of the interesting aspects of the play is that robots are not described as mechanic but as fleshy, and they are used as metaphors for the situation of real oppressed workers (A. Roberts 116). But robots have become widely well-known thanks to Issac Asimov and his *Robot* series. Together with John Campbell, editor of the magazine *Astounding*, he formulated the "three laws of robotics," laws that Asimov's robots always follow. The first law states that robots may not injure human beings directly or indirectly through lack of action. The second law posits that robots must obey humans, except for orders that conflict with the previous law. Finally, a robot must protect its own existence as long as this does not conflict with the two previous laws (A. Roberts 116-7). According to these laws, robots are somehow subjugated to human beings, whose lives are far more important than those of robots, since the last ones can be created. In this portrayal we can also see the same situation of exploitation that can be ascribed to the image of the robot provided by Čapek in his play.

As other SF figures, robots work as metaphors for human fears. Just as the alien embodies otherness and difference, robots can symbolize our anxieties about modern society and what progress entails in terms of servitude and exploitation (Aldiss 250). There are several possible interpretations for the metaphor of the robot in SF texts. For example, for Claudia Springer, robots represent the "fear evoked by industrial age machines for their ability to function independently of humans" (486). In the case of the critic Adam Roberts, robots echo "the dramatization of the alterity of the machine, the paranoid sense of the inorganic come to life" (118). As we can see, in these interpretations the focus is always on the human rather than on the other creature to which the human is opposed. For this reason, one of the most interesting SF figures of recent years is that of the cyborg. In the case of cyborgs there is no distinction between human and machine since they incorporate both by being defined as "neither wholly technological nor completely organic" (Balsamo 11). For this reason, cyborgs embody hybridity and become powerful metaphors for talking about trespassing boundaries.

One of the most prominent critics working on the cyborg is philosopher Donna Haraway. According to Haraway, the term cyborg—the short form for "cybernetic organism"—was coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Klyne in 1960, and it referred to an "enhanced man" that was able to live in "extraterrestrial environments" (*Modest* 51). For them, the cyborg, a mixture of man and machine, would be the perfect creature for space flights and for surviving in the worlds to which this creature would arrive in a spaceship—a description that seems to be taken from a SF novel. Haraway's definition of the cyborg is developed in "A Cyborg Manifesto," one of the chapters of her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature,* and in which she describes the cyborg as both "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (*Simians* 149). But Haraway moves from the traditional image of the cyborg as a mixture of human flesh and machine and she develops a whole theory on the cyborg as related to women's experience in the last decades. In order to give some type of background to her theory, she acknowledges the types of cyborgs that we encounter in our society. She talks about the traditional cyborg that we can find in SF texts but she also comments on modern medicine and in the use of inorganic prosthesis that make the patient a mixture of organic and, to a much lesser extent, inorganic materials.

But for Haraway the cyborg is more than a cybernetic organism, since it works as a metaphor for the trespassing of boundaries. For example, she rejects the traditional dualism culture/nature and says that the dualism has to be reworked since "the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" (*Simians* 151). She also

challenges the dualism human/animal by recalling DNA analyses that show how similar human animals and non-human animals are. In all these cases, the image of the cyborg as a metaphor for the trespassing of boundaries is always present, especially in a moment of our history in which machines make it difficult to distinguish between "natural and artificial, mind and body", and in which "machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" (*Simians* 152). One interesting aspect of her manifesto is that she recognizes that she is indebted to several writers and feminist authors, and among them we can find Joanna Russ, Samuel R. Delaney, John Varley, James Tiptree, Jr, or Octavia Butler. All these authors write SF, and most of them do so from a feminist and/or ecological point of view, making their writing interesting from the perspective of the cyborg and the trespassing of boundaries; in fact, Haraway refers to these authors as "theorists for cyborgs" (*Simians* 174).

Regarding SF and cyborg theory, Donna Haraway is not interested in those works that focus on the apocalypse and the nostalgia for the past. For her, cyborg writing has to deal with survival by "seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (Haraway, *Simians* 175). Haraway's focus is especially on feminist SF because the cyborgs that we find in those works clearly destabilize dualistic categories and traditional categories of women, men, animal or race, among others. As Haraway claims survival instead of nostalgia, she also talks about regeneration instead of rebirth. For her, the future encompasses new categories such as the monster, which is no longer a frightening creature but a desirable status. Haraway's monsters live in a world without gender, without boundaries to trespass, without dualisms to map our reality.

Although Haraway's concept of the cyborg is rather complex, her manifesto has been embraced by many SF scholars, especially feminist ones. For some of them, Haraway's theory is interesting because it puts together feminist theory as well as a "critical analysis of science"—a very important element in SF (Hollinger, "Posthumanism" 274). Veronica Hollinger comments that the combination of these two theoretical elements makes it possible for feminist SF to have a place in postmodern debates. In fact, Hollinger relates Haraway's cyborg and its trespassing of boundaries with "postmodern border crossing and boundary breakdown" ("Posthumanism" 274). But Haraway does not only talk about trespassing boundaries in an abstract sense, since she comments on the power of technoscience for breaking down categories that were inviolable before. Thanks to technoscience it is possible to challenge the category of gender as well as the boundary "between animals and humans and between humans and machines" (Csicsery-Ronan, "Marxist" 122).

With her redefinition of the cyborg, Haraway invites us to move beyond its traditional image in SF and to understand the potential of such a monster. The cyborg threatens the traditional binary oppositions that underlie Western patriarchal thought and invite the audience to envision an alternative society without dualisms (Cornea 275). Other authors move beyond this idea and comment that cyborg bodies do not only reject dualisms but that they also challenge our construction of the body, both as a material entity and a discursive process (Balsamo 11). Because of this, the cyborg does not only carry the hope of a genderless future world without binary oppositions, it also implies that we need to rewrite our concept of humanity and of human subjectivity (Cornea 276).

There are several examples of SF works in which we can find the image of the cyborg that evokes in the audience the question of what makes us humans. One of the most well-known examples of cyborgs are the replicants of Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982). Although these creatures are described as androids, that is, robots with human appearance, they can also be depicted as cyborg since they are a mixture of flesh and machine. The replicants are portrayed as machines that are alive and difficult to distinguish from ordinary human beings. In spite of this, replicants are considered second class citizens and they are created for carrying out jobs humans are not interested in. The problem with the replicants is that when they are created they are also assigned a day to die and that makes them anxious. Throughout the film—as well as in the novel on which the movie is based, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*—the dialogues among the different protagonists make the audience wonder about what it means to be human and how difficult it is to define humanity (A. Roberts 118). When the replicant Roy (Rutger Hauer) is about to die in front of Deckard (Harrison Ford), he regrets all the things that will die with him: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I've watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those... moments will be lost in time, like tears...in rain. Time to die" (n.p.). These words are so important to Deckard, whose orders were to chase and kill the escaped replicants, that he reflects:

> I don't know why he saved my life. Maybe in those last moments he loved life more than he ever had before. Not just his life... anybody's life... my life. All he'd wanted was the same answers the rest of us want. Where do I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got? All I could do is sit there and watch him die. (n.p.)

As we see, Deckard changes his view of replicants once he realizes that their similarities surpass their differences since both humans and replicants wonder about the purpose of life and about death.

Another SF figure that has challenged our concept of humanity, and one which has been the protagonist of many SF books and novels, is the alien. Tracing back the history of the alien we notice that this figure has always been associated with the idea of otherness. The term alien, of Latin origin (*alienus)*, came into English from the Old French (Onions 25). According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English* alien means "belonging to another person, place, or family; strange, foreign, not of one's own" (Murray et al 218). The term alien has been continuously used as synonym for foreign people, and it is very common to find it in the context of immigration even nowadays, despite its negative connotations. SF adopted the word in order to refer to the civilization whose planet of origin is not the Earth. The alien has always represented "a fear of foreigners, anxiety about contamination of national values, racial purity and relaxed concerns" (Berger 139). As Helen Merrick points out in her article "Gender in Science Fiction," the alien "could signify everything that was 'other' to the dominant audience of middle-class, young white Western males—including women, people of color, other nationalities, classes and sexualities" (243). The inclusion of the alien resulted in an interesting way of dealing with issues which were disregarded by SF authors, especially in the first half of the 20th century. For example, many editors and publishers rejected the inclusion of black characters in SF works not dealing with racism because they believed they would distract the reader from the scientific component of the work (Bonner 52). However, the alien served that purpose when it became a metaphor of those considered the *other*, also in SF: "One big blue extra-terrestrial whose humanity is revealed and accepted can be metaphorically substituted for an examination of any number of actual social divisions, as witness many past discussions on the absence of women/ non Caucasians/ homosexuals/ disabled people from sf" (Bonner 52).

The history of the character of the alien is rather interesting from a social point of view since its evolution somehow mirrors the evolution of the treatment of otherness. Since its origins, most SF works have portrayed aliens as extraterrestrial evil creatures opposed to humans. In her article "The New Aliens of Science Fiction" Nicola Griffith traces the history of the alien from its beginnings and she comments that the first aliens of pulp SF were usually portrayed as "slimy bug-eyed monsters" (n.p.). Aliens as invaders have a long career in SF history, representing the anxieties and fears of a society for which difference and otherness are usually a threat. For example, in H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1898), the author uses an alien invasion of the Earth to portray the fears of the British society towards the beginning of the new century and the possible challenge to Victorian values that the 20th century could bring.

During the 1950s, stories of alien invasions flowered as a result of the paranoia provoked by the Cold War (Booker and Thomas 28). An example of this is Robert A. Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* (1951) in which an alien invasion works as an allegory for the threat that communism poses in the United States. During most of the 20th century aliens were depicted as evil creatures whose main interest was invading the Earth. Wells' aliens represent the type of aliens that we usually find in SF novels and stories during the first half of the 20th century, that is, intelligent creatures that are unable to feel, that "have no emotions, no sense of empathy with others. They are, then, *inhuman*" (Berger 137). This description of the alien reinforces the binary opposition of human/alien, since the alien is portrayed as completely non-human.

However, the portrayal of the alien during the second half of the century evolved and became more complex. The alien stopped being that creature with whom human beings could not feel any connection at all. Nicola Griffith states that at this time the line between "Us, humanity, and Them, the monstrous enemy" (n.p.) stopped being completely clear. For instance, in Doris Lessing's *Shikasta,* we perceive as aliens a civilization that inhabit a planet called Shikasta, which happens to work as an allegorical Earth. In this novel, the inhabitants of Shikasta—the alleged Earth—are regarded as the *other*, even though the reader can easily identify some of the events that take place in the fictional planet as part of our own history. As Doris Lessing, other SF writers started portraying alien societies acknowledging their similarities with us. Another example is Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, in which humans are fighting against an alien species that look like insects. At the end of the novel, the main protagonist, Ender, realizes that he has become a xenocide—killer of an alien civilization—and from that moment he decides to defend other creatures that because of their strangeness may be killed even before being considered a real threat.

One of the most famous examples that help us realize the evolution of the character of the alien throughout the second half of the 20th century is that of the *Alien* movie series. The first movie of the series appeared in 1979 under the title of *Alien* and was directed by Ridley Scott. In this movie we see how an alien organism gets into the spaceship Nostromo and starts killing all its occupants until there is only one survivor, Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver). At the beginning, the role of Ripley was written for a male actor, but it is the choice of Sigourney Weaver what makes the relationship between alien and human even more prominent since women have usually been associated with aliens in their role as the *other* to men. The alien of the first movie is portrayed as an evil creature without empathy; it kills every member of the crew of the Nostromo, except for Ripley, who miraculously survives by attacking the alien.

One of the peculiar aspects of this movie is that the alien is portrayed as "a black-skinned monster" that was actually played "by a black actor in a suit" (A. Roberts 95). The blackness of Scott's alien is significant, not only because blackness makes it difficult to find the alien in the dim atmosphere of the Nostromo, but because its dark skin makes the audience associate it with evil and with the *other*; whereas the human protagonist, Ripley, is a white woman symbolizing humanity and what is good. Although Scott's alien is black probably because he wanted it to represent evil and because that color makes it easier for the creature to hide in the spaceship, we cannot fail to notice the implications of race in the choice of the black color. Considering the blackness of the alien as some sort of racist connotation, it may be thought that blackness is that portrayed as a threat. Nevertheless, I tend to attribute the choice of the color for the need of camouflage and to reflect human fear of the dark. Racial issues do not seem to be significant in the novel as the *other* is already clearly present.

Seven years after the appearance of *Alien*, James Cameron directed its sequel *Aliens* (1986). Ripley is rescued from space after decades of wandering in a small spaceship in suspended animation. Although at first no one believes her story, some time later she is asked to travel with a rescue team in order to investigate what has happened to the colony established in the planet LV-426, where the spaceship Nostromo had landed in the previous movie. Once more the aliens are portrayed as evil creatures that have annihilated the colony except for a small girl called Newt, whom Ripley takes under her care as if she were her own child. This maternal behavior can be explained in two different ways. First, Ripley may see in this child a mirror of herself since in the first movie she is the only survivor of her group. Second, and according to the director's cut of *Aliens*, Ripley had a daughter who died while she was wandering in suspended animation across the universe. Therefore, for Ripley Newt is a special character for whom she even risks her life. Regarding the evolution of the alien in this second movie, the most important scene takes place when Ripley is rescuing Newt and they happen to be at the place where the alien mother lays her eggs. At that moment Ripley and the alien mother look at each other recognizing that both are acting as a mother taking care of her progeny. The spectator is able to notice how there is some sort of empathy between Ripley and the alien queen because they both fear for their children. At this moment of the movie we see how the empathy between Ripley and the queen tears down for an instant the boundary between human and alien. However, seconds later, once Newt is in Ripley's arms, the protagonist burns the alien eggs and escapes, breaking this significant truce.

During most of the third movie of the Alien series, *Alien*[3] (1992), Ripley fights against the alien that is attacking the prison colony where she arrives after escaping from the planet of

the previous movie. The alien travelled in her spaceship and throughout the movie she wonders if she may have an alien growing within her body. At the end of the movie, once she is sure that she is infected with an alien, she decides to sacrifice herself instead of letting others use the alien for military purposes. She is aware of the dangerous nature of the alien she carries in her body—it is an alien queen able to lay eggs—and of the impossibility to control it, so she kills herself. However, Ripley comes back in 1997 for the last of the *Alien* movies, *Alien Resurrection*, set two hundred years after the events of the third part. From the beginning of the movie both Ripley and the spectator realize that she is no longer a human being. She discovers that after several failed attempts to duplicate her DNA, she has been successfully cloned combining human DNA with alien DNA. But the reason why Ripley is cloned is because the scientists wanted to get an alien queen from her body, something they eventually achieve. In fact, there is a point in the movie when Ripley faces the alien queen while it is giving birth to an alien creature that looks neither completely human, nor alien. The peculiar aspect of this new born alien is that it recognizes Ripley as its mother. At the end of the movie Ripley kills this human-alien creature while spectators appreciate her empathy for it. This is quite controversial because she is half-human-half-alien herself and the arrival of her DNA to Earth can have unpredictable results. However, she does not commit suicide as she did in the previous movie when she learned she had an alien growing in her chest. I think that this change is the result of her acceptance of alienness, but also of her belief that her alienness can be controlled.

Even though the fourth movie was not as acclaimed as the first one, it is the most interesting one regarding otherness. In the first three movies we see how the relationship between human and alien changes and the boundary between the two species becomes thinner, but it is in the final movie where this boundary is completely trespassed. Although Ripley's appearance is mostly human, her DNA is a mixture of human and alien. Something similar happens with the character of Annalee Call (Winona Ryder), who looks like a young woman but is actually an android. Throughout the movie, these two characters develop a special relationship of care and concern. Although these two characters are not human, they behave according to values and attitudes usually ascribed to humanity. For example, even though Ripley is a survivor and half an alien, when she finds her agonizing clones suffering in a stretcher in a laboratory she decides to put an end to their awful lives—actually one of this monsters asks Ripley to end its life. She also feels some kind of empathy towards Annalee Call, who is one of the last androids in the universe, and thus a survivor like herself. In fact, they are the two sole survivors of the fourth movie, and the last scene shows them in a shuttle

travelling back to the Earth. As Patricia Linton comments, these two non-human women share their situation as outsiders, as the *other*: "both unnatural, both constructed, both alone in the sense of being without family, cohort, race, culture, species, without any of the ways of belonging that comfort us and make us peers" (184).

Throughout the four movies of the *Alien* series, which span two decades, we can explore the evolution of the figure of the alien at the end of the 20th century. In the first movies, the alien is portrayed as an evil creature that does not resemble human beings either physically or psychologically, which implies a total hyperseparation. However, in the last movie of the series we see that Ripley acknowledges her alien nature and accepts her otherness—although she kills the other human-alien creature because of the danger it poses to humanity. Therefore, and as Adam Roberts points out, the *Alien* movies could be easily described "as being about hybridization" (81). These movies mirror the situation of the alien in SF literature, since more and more authors started rewriting the character of the alien not as the evil creature opposed to human beings, but as an alternative mode of life, not always threatening.

Another example that illustrates the evolution of the alien in recent decades is the television series of *Battlestar Galactica.* The series was first broadcast in 1978 with 21 episodes, and it depicted the adventures of a group of humans going across the galaxy searching for a planet to establish themselves after the destruction of their planets at the hands of the Cylons. In the original series the Cylons were described as aliens coming from the planet Cylon, though their appearance is very similar to that of a robot. These Cylons are portrayed according to the standard of aliens of the first half of the 20th century, i.e., as evil creatures whose sole purpose is the merciless destruction of humankind. At the same time, human beings try to survive the Cylon attacks while they go searching for a legendary planet to start again: the Earth. In 1980, a spin-off of the series appeared—set thirty years after the end of the original series—and it was focused was on how humans survived on Earth while trying to avoid the Cylons.

In 2003, a remake of *Battlestar Galactica* was broadcast in the Sci-Fi (later SyFy) channel in the form of a miniseries. Later, from 2004 to 2009 the new *Battlestar Galactica* became a successful series. The plot of this new version is very similar to the original one since it depicts a group of humans travelling across the universe searching for the Earth. However, this new version offers a new and controversial portrayal of the Cylons. In this remake, Cylons are created by men as robots to work on things men did not want to do. As in other books and movies about robots, the Cylons rebel and fight against humans for years

until one day when they surprisingly disappear. Years later, they suddenly attack the twelve human colonies committing genocide and forcing the survivors to search for another planet to start again. The interesting aspect of the Cylons of the remake is that they are not aliens but human creations. Besides, they are able to evolve by themselves and to change their appearance from metallic to organic, becoming something like androids. These Cylons start persecuting humans across the galaxy, but as the series continues, some Cylons show autonomous ways of thinking, opposed to those of the rest of their species. Even though most of the Cylons want to exterminate humans, a small group wonders if it would be possible to ally themselves with humans in order to start from scratch in a new planet, the Earth. Finally, humans and Cylons establish hybrid colonies after discovering that it is possible for the two species to have children together.

As in the case of *Alien*, the different versions of *Battlestar Galactica* show the evolution of the figure of the alien in recent decades. Cylons started being aliens but in the remake they were turned into robots created by men. In their rebellion, spectators can recognize the historical rebellion of all those civilizations and social classes that fought against their conquerors and/or their masters. Therefore, since the beginning of the new version of the series, and taking into account their human appearance, Cylons are presented so that they inspire some sort of sympathy in human spectators. Throughout the series we also see how Cylons become similar to human beings, not only in their physical appearance, but also in their attitudes and weaknesses. In fact, some humans establish sentimental relationships with Cylons and it is precisely the child of one of these unions who, according to the series, becomes the first *homo sapiens* on Earth. Obviously, the end of the series is quite controversial since it would not be possible from a historical or a technological point of view, but it is significant if we consider how it challenges the human/alien dualism.

Both *Battelestar Galactica* and *Alien* invite spectators to recognize and acknowledge the *other* within the self. In *Battelestar Galactica* we are told that human beings as we know them are the result of the mixture of two different species. At the end of *Alien Resurrection*, it is the half-human half-alien Ripley and a female android who survive and are about to reach the Earth. These two examples show how the image of the alien—and that of SF monsters in general—has evolved and become controversial because they stopped being the *other*, and started being a part of the self that demanded recognition. In many contemporary movies and novels, the alien is thus represented not as the *other*, "but as in-between creature—not entirely strange, not entirely human" (Linton 172). This shift in the conception of SF imagery is mostly indebted to feminist SF writers, who made use of these marginal creatures in order to

talk about otherness and marginalization. Both in *Alien* and in *Battelestar Galactica* female characters play an important role in the acknowledgement of the *other*, since they are the ones who build bridges among civilizations and species. In a similar way, in the novels analyzed in this dissertation, women are also central. Both Joan Slonczewski and Octavia Butler are considered feminist SF writers since their works deal with gender issues, but also their female protagonists are the ones who risk their lives to build bridges between humans and aliens, as in the examples above. One of the conclusions of *Battelestar Galactica* and *Alien* is that the future of humanity lies in the recognition of the *other* as a necessary part of the self. This is precisely one of the main ideas in the works by Slonczewski and by Butler, who, as other female SF writers celebrate the hybrid and provide "a direct access to the poetics of alterity" (A. Roberts 81).

As we have seen, the alien and other SF monsters represent the "encounter with difference" (A. Roberts 83) that many SF authors explore in their works. By including aliens or, as Adam Roberts call them, expressions of "material difference, which is to say non-humanity—a space alien, a machine, a symbolic novum", writers are free to explore and reflect on "what it is like to have the label 'different' imposed on a person by some normalizing system" (78-9). For this reason, feminist writers found in SF imagery the perfect vehicle for expressing their concerns regarding gender issues and gender inequality. Something similar can be said of homosexual writers or of writers belonging to ethnic minorities, like Octavia Butler or Samuel Delaney. As Gwyneth Jones states in her article "The Icons of Science Fiction", the alien will remain an essential character in SF "as long as there are other people around (especially if they look a little strange)" (Jones 169).

2.6 SCIENCE FICTION AND NATURE

This last section about SF theory is devoted to the analysis of the relationship between SF and nature. As previously commented, recent SF is much concerned with the problems of our world, and environmental degradation is one of the most popular themes, especially in the form of disaster novels. Post-apocalyptic settings do not only offer new social systems, but also the implication of some sort of ecological catastrophe. However, Noel Gough points out that it is surprising to notice that despite the large number of SF writers that deal with ecological matters, the genre continues to be "relatively undervalued in many disciplines that subject environmental literature to critical scrutiny" (409). For example, Brian Stableford notices that ecocriticism has "tended to ignore SF" (140), although little by little ecocritics and ecofeminists have begun to consider the importance of such a popular genre as SF in criticizing dangerous behaviors towards the environment. One of the most important critics that deal with the relationship between SF and environmental issues is Patrick D. Murphy, who has written numerous articles on the topic such as "The Non-Alibi of Alien Scapes: SF and Ecocriticism" in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, or "Environmentalism" in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction.*

Considering SF and environmentalism, and in relation to the idea of extrapolation, Ursula Heise points out two different ways in which SF texts can approach the present. Firstly, she highlights those works in which dystopian futures are seen as the consequence of "current configurations of capitalism, climate change, biotechnologies, or species loss," and which invite readers to reflect on our present "as the matrix of the past from which dystopia sprang" (5). Secondly, she explains that there are other environmentalist texts/films which portray the present "as already invaded by the future," and whose purpose is "to persuade the reader of the current reality of ecological crisis and of the necessity to adapt to irreversibly changed conditions (5). As we can see, SF texts and films can work as vehicles to promote environmental awareness by offering readers an alternative future to reflect on the present.

The history of the relationship between SF and the environment started during the environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, one of the most common topics in SF novels has been "the dilemma of the effects of human beings on our biosphere" (Slonczewski and Levy 183). However, in other works, such as Frank Herbert's *Dune* or Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, authors do not only explore the consequences of human mastering of nature but also how human beings respond to alternative conditions they have produced themselves "such as an overpopulated earth or the strange environs of another

planet" (Gough 411). Although usually the focus of these works is on humans, these novels also tend to make of the environment another character, if not the protagonist itself (Gough 411). Gough states that this focus on the environment is especially interesting in those SF stories that take place in other worlds, whether we talk about other planets or about "this world as it might have been or may yet be" (411). Therefore, and as Murphy posits, some works of SF can be described as nature-oriented literature since they direct "reader attention toward the natural world and human interaction with other aspects of nature within that world" ("Non-Alibi" 264).

There are many examples of SF works in which the environment plays an important role in the development of the story. In his book *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*, Patrick Murphy comments on three different types of SF novels according to their environmental engagement. In first place, he points out those SF novels "that can both provide factual information about nature and human-nature interactions as well as provide thematically environmentalist extrapolations of conflict and crisis based on such information." In second place, he states that some works of both SF and fantasy "can provide analogous depictions of ecosystems and human interaction with such systems." The final group is made up of SF and fantasy works that "can demonstrate the disastrous consequences of exploitive relationships between humans and other humans, humans and other sentient beings, and humans and ecosystems in which they are exotic" (*Farther* 41).

Murphy's classification helps us understand the variety of SF works that may be approached from an ecocritical perspective. Many of these novels place on nature, or on a natural element, an essential role for the development of the story. One example of this could be water because of its importance for the survival of human species. SF writer J.G. Ballard is one of the writers that most has exploited the possibilities of water in SF. For example, in his novel *The Drowned World* (1964) Ballard portrays a post-apocalyptic Earth whose polar ice caps have melted because of solar radiation. Another example is *The Burning World*, written in 1964, and expanded a year later and entitled *The Drought*. This other novel describes a world in which water is scarce because the water cycle has been altered by pollution. Although Ballard's novels, as well as other stories he wrote dealing with ecological ruin, may seem rather pessimistic, he believed that stories of natural catastrophes were "positive and constructive" (Gough 410) in the sense that they would promote an environmental awareness among his readers.

Perhaps the best well-known SF series about water and ecology is Frank Herbert's *Dune*. *Dune* is made up of six novels that encompass more than 3000 years, covering many

events in which a long list of characters take part. The series explore issues such as religion, fanatism or politics, among others; but as Felicia Campbell states, it is the ecology of the planet known as *Dune* which "plays a role greater than the role of any of the major characters" (70). *Dune* was a huge accomplishment that had difficulties in finding publishers in spite of later becoming a worldwide bestseller. Through the complexity of these six novels, Herbert presents his concerns about ecology by portraying the consequences of climate change and the "long term preservation of natural resources" (Slonczewski and Levy 183). *Dune* analyzes the process of human-induced climate change to turn a hostile desert planet into an inhabitable one with oceans and forests. However, this process has unforeseen consequences such as the disapearance of the sandworm, the creature that produces the substance that makes interstellar journeys possible, thus ruining the commerce on which the planet relies.

Since the environment is one of the major topics in the SF written in the last decades, the number of works in which the natural world becomes an essential element in the development of the story is huge. One of most recurrent SF subgenres for exploring environmental issues is that of disaster or post-apocalyptic fiction or "in novels predicting impending environmental collapse" (Slonczewski and Levy 183). The importance of SF stories dealing with these topics is based on the fact that "any prediction of environmental disaster that has been made in recent years has been prefigured in science fiction in one way or another" (Murphy, "Non-Alibi" 264). These novels usually portray the different ways in which life on the Earth could come to an end. Although this way of celebrating nature may be a contradictory one, many of the authors of this subgenre, such as J.G. Ballard, think that the use of natural catastrophes can be "interpreted as extended metaphors of our failed relationship with the earth" (Gough 410). In fact, most of the SF written during the 1990s is characterized by a pessimistic view of environmental problems, considering that no solution would be possible. Many of these works imply that human mismanagement of nature has been so complete, that the idea of a new society more respectful towards the environment could only take place in a distant future and after "a wiser reconstitution of human society – and perhaps of human nature" (Stableford 137).

Another interesting aspect of disaster fiction—as well as of some works of SF in general—is its predictive character. Some of the discoveries developed during the 20th and 21th centuries were already foreseen in the works of authors like Jules Verne. Similarly, SF has also been able to predict most of the environmental disasters that have taken place in recent years. Prediction is something that environmentalists have to take into account, since it

is necessary to realize the long-term consequences of decisions made today, or as Richard Kerridge points out, "consequences such as global warming do not register as immediate changes in life around us, but must be projected, uncertainly, onto the world fifty years hence" (243). For this reason, ecocriticism and other nature-oriented criticisms should realize the possibilities of SF in general and of apocalyptic narratives in particular (Kerridge 244-45).

The environmental crisis and other social problems seem to be so embedded in our world that we do not think about them anymore, and if we do, it is just to note that they do not really affect us in the present. Unless we personally experience an environmental catastrophe such an oil spill or the extinction of a species, we do not actually realize our mismanagement of the natural world. For this purpose, it is essential to acknowledge the potential of fiction, which enables us to "see our problems more clearly in a context out of the traditional one that too often blinds us through our very familiarity with it" (Campbell 69). Thus, fiction becomes an appropriate vehicle for exploring issues whose importance seems to be masked by closeness and familiarity. In the case of environmentalism, SF, because of its extrapolative character, makes it possible for writers to humanize the environmental crisis and to make readers aware of the consequences of their present actions. For instance, practices and attitudes that may be "be ethically justified or technically correct today may prove to be erroneous tomorrow" (Murphy, "Non-Alibi" 277), and fiction is useful to imagine the future consequences of these practices. When we talk about not-so-future issues such as global warming, overpopulation or deforestation, we tend to consider series of numbers, graphs and statistics that are objective data for the common reader. However, if writers invite readers to live in a world suffering from very high temperatures, where humans fight against each other, and where water has become a valuable object, then readers will identify with the protagonists and make of global warming a real human problem (Campbell 70). Regarding this, Scott Slovic and Paul Slovic comment that we need both "numbers and nerves" (14), that is, "the deliberative, logical, evidence-based 'rational system' and the 'experiential system,' which encodes reality in images, metaphors and narratives associated with feelings with *affect*" (14; emphasis in original). Therefore, objective data can have a greater effect on us if they are combined with the identification of the reader with a narrative plot and the human characters.

An example of how SF can humanize a supposedly distant problem like climatic change is Octavia Butler's *Parable Series: Parable of the Sower* (1994) and *Parable of the Talents* (1999). Some people have considered these novels as a kind of prophecy, but Octavia Butler in an interview for *Democracy Now* preferred to describe them as cautionary tales (Butler, Gonzalez and Goodman n.p.). With these novels she wanted to warn readers about

the possible effects of humans' misbehavior regarding the environment. As she explained in an interview: "if we keep misbehaving ourselves, ignoring what we've been ignoring, doing what we've been doing to the environment, for instance, here's what we're liable to wind up with" (Butler, González, Goodman n.p.). When Butler started the *Parable Series* the issue of global warming was continuously appearing and disappearing from the public scene. The author found this surprising since she believed that such an important issue as global warming should receive more attention. For this reason, Butler decided to make of ecology, and in particular of global warming, "almost a character in *Parable of the Sower*" (Rowell and Butler 61). The novel portrays an apocalyptic world suffering from global warming, and as a consequence of the climatic change, most people live in walled communities because cities have become dangerous places. Because of the lack of rains, water has become a precious element to the extent that it costs "several times as much as gasoline" (Butler, *Parable* 15-16) and people are willing to kill for it. The prize of water is so high that firemen do not put out fires unless they are paid a huge amount of money, and fires are quite frequent because of a drug that makes people pyromaniac. Thus, Octavia Butler uses her work to portray environmental issues that were important during her lifetime. In this particular case, global warming is still present in environmental debates, thus supporting the predictive character of SF works.

Although SF works are only fiction, their scope is wider than that of some scientific texts depicting the consequences of the environmental crisis we face today. The speculative character of the genre provides alternative realities that readers can experience "no matter how far-out these alternatives may seem" (Campbell 70). However, speculation in SF is not only helpful to consider the consequences of our actions in the future, but also to propose alternative lifestyles more respectful towards the environment. This is another reason why disciplines such as ecocriticism or ecofeminism should pay attention to the genre (Gough 413). For this reason, this dissertation is aimed at demonstrating how SF and ecofeminism can benefit one from the other by not only criticizing the mismanagement of nature, but also by providing examples of alternative lifestyles more respectful to the natural world. After having considered the main theoretical features of SF relevant to this dissertation, the next section will explore the theoretical framework from which the novels under discussion will be approached: ecofeminism.

III. ECOFEMINISM

If SF can be described as the "encounter with difference" and feminist SF explores alterity and otherness by using typical SF imagery as the aliens, then ecofeminism as both a philosophical movement and a type of literary criticism is useful when approaching a SF text. One of the main concerns of ecofeminism is that of critiquing oppressive conceptual frameworks such as patriarchy, and analyzing how these frameworks are characterized by the domination, exploitation and subjugation of whomever is considered the *other*, whether human or non-human. Ecofeminism also aims at ending patriarchy—and any other form of oppression—by envisioning alternative lifestyles based on a respectful and healthy relationship towards the *other*. In order to do so, Judith Plant invites people to feel the life of the *other* "literally experiencing its existence," because she believes that would entail "the new starting point for human decision-making" ("Toward a New World" 1). In a similar way, ecofeminist critic Patrick D. Murphy posits that only by recognizing the *other* as a "self-sentient entity" can we imagine a world in which difference does not entail "binary opposition and hierarchical valorization" ("Ecofeminist" 194). Because SF allows us to imagine an otherwise non-existent civilization, the genre enables writers and readers to experience ecofeminist ideas as part of the real world and not as part of an abstract theory.

Ecofeminism is concerned with the relationship between women and nature, but the image of nature that ecofeminists are concerned with is not that of the passive entity in patriarchal thought, but that of a complex group of systems which work in harmony together, affecting each other. This view of the environment as a set of systems is related to the concept of ecology, which is the science that studies the interdependence, interconnectedness and interrelationships of all forms of life (Murphy, "Ecofeminist" 194; Plant, "Searching" 155; King, "Toward an Ecological Feminism" 119). Whereas traditionally the environment has been considered something apart from human beings, ecofeminists defend the definition of ecology which implies that humans are part of the same ecosystem which they affect with their actions. By supporting this view of an ecosystem as a network, the environment—from which human beings have been alienated—stops being considered a resource to be exploited without considering the consequences (Plant, "Searching" 155). The importance of acknowledging the place of humans in the ecosystem is essential, and that is why promoting ecological awareness is necessary for "reconstructing human society in harmony with the natural environment" (King, "Toward and Ecological Feminism" 119).

Ecofeminism or ecological feminism has become a recognizable movement only very recently though it represents long-standing concerns about the situation of women and nature and how both are related. The term *écofeminisme* was coined by the French feminist writer Françoise d'Eaubonne. The word appeared for the first time in 1974 in her book *Le Féminisme ou la mort*, in which she offers the background of the term and an explanation of its meaning, although she further developed the idea in her later book *Écologie, Féminisme: Révolution ou mutation?* (1978) (Gates 16). With the term *écofeminism* d'Eaubonne wanted to highlight "women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution," and this revolution would not only "ensure human survival on the planet" but it would also "entail new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature" (Merchant, "Ecofeminism" 100). In the same historical moment in which d'Eaubonne published her ideas on ecofeminism, the ecofeminist movement also emerged in the form of activism in different areas of the world. For example, at the end of the seventies many women took an active part in the demonstrations against the Three Mile Island accident and the Love Canal disaster; and in northern India women started to hug trees in the socio-environmental movement known as Chipko movement, as a way of protesting against massive deforestation (Gates 15).

Tracing back the history of ecofeminsm in the United States,[6] Ynestra King appears as one of the key figures since she developed the idea of ecofeminism at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont around 1976. Carolyn Merchant points out two different events that contributed to the spread of the term (*Earthcare* 5). The first one was the conference on "Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 1980s," organized in Amherst (Massachusetts) in 1980 by Ynestra King, Celeste Wesson, Grace Paley, Anna Gyorgy, Christina Rawley, Nancy Jack Todd, and Deborah Gaventa. The celebration of this conference was the result of the outrage experienced due to the Three Mile Island catastrophe (Spretnak 8) and it was a decisive event for the development of the term ecofeminism (Rey Torrijos 137). The second event that encouraged the spread of ecofeminism was the Women's Pentagon Action to protest against nuclear weapons and weapon development in general. Then, during the 1980s cultural feminists in the United States incorporated the term ecofeminism to their discourse believing "that both women and nature could be liberated together" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 5).

[6] Since this dissertation focuses on the development of SF in the United States and in the work of two authors born in this country, the analysis of the ecofeminist movement will pay special attention to its evolution in the United States.

Although the 1980 conference in Amherst is considered as one of the important events that give rise to the concept of ecofeminism as it is understood nowadays, there had already been another conference on the issue entitled "Women and the Environment," organized by Sandra Marburg and Lisa Watson at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1974. In 1981, and apparently without knowing of the existence of the Amherst conference, Susan Adler and other women at Sonoma State University in California began planning a conference entitled "Women and the Environment: The First West Coast Ecofeminist Conference;" it was precisely in that same year when an ecofeminist conference called "Women and Life on Earth" was held in London (Spretnak 8).

Apart from the conferences whose main theme was that of women and nature, in the 1980s several important books on ecofeminism appeared. Between 1975 and 1981, Rosemary Radford Ruether's *New Woman/New Earth,* Elizabeth Dodson Gray's anti-hierarchical *Green Paradise Lost*, Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology,* Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* and Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* were published. In 1981, Ynestra King's manifesto "The Eco-Feminist Imperative" was also published, "a key text that that marked ecofeminism as both a distinct theoretical framework for feminist ecology and a distinct activist possibility for feminist writings on nature" (Sandilands 15). Regarding all the texts that appeared in those years and which became founding works of ecofeminism, Catriona Sandilands comments that all of them focus on the "historical polarization of humanity from nature, men from women, mind from body, and reason from emotion in the philosophical and religious development of ideals of transcendent humanity" (15). In particular, Merchant's *The Death of Nature* explores how the scientific revolution affected our vision of nature and in so doing, the position of women in society.

From 1980 onwards several books appear dealing with ecofeminism, as Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland's *Reclaim the Earth* (1983), but also feminist and lesbian-feminist journals and periodicals echo the theories of ecofeminism and articles on the issue. Chris J. Cuomo points out that it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that books specifically dealing with ecofeminist theory started to be published (26). Two of these books are Judith Plant's *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* (1989) and the one edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria F. Orenstein, *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism.* These two books offer a complete overview of the different ideas and perspectives covered by the term ecofeminism, with articles written by the most prominent ecofeminist authors such as Susan Griffin, Carolyn Merchant, Ynestra King, Vandana Shiva, Charlene Spretnak or Starhawk. Other important books published more recently are

Ecofeminism by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, Great Gaard's *Ecofeminism* (1993), Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1994) and *Environmental Culture* (2001), Patrick Murphy's *Literature, Nature, and Other* (1995), Karen Warren's *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (1997) and *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (2000), or Greta Gaard's and Patrick Murphy's *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (1998).

Although most works on ecofeminist philosophy and literary criticism have been published by American authors, there are some exceptions in the books above mentioned—Val Plumwood, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva are the most prominent ones. Considering the publication of ecofeminist works in other languages than English it is interesting to acknowledge that despite the French coinage of the term, ecofeminist writings are mostly in English. Since this dissertation is presented at a Spanish University, I consider it is important to mention the development of ecofeminist theories in this country. In the book *Ecocríticas. Literatura y Medio Ambiente*, Esther Rey Torrijos points out that in Spain, as in many other non-English speaking countries, ecofeminism has had a later development (161). In Rey Torrijos' exploration of ecofeminist works in Spanish she highlights Mª Xosé Agra Romero's *Ecología y Feminismo* (1998), which encompasses a series of ecofeminist articles translated into Spanish, thus giving a general idea of what ecofeminism is about (161-62). Another important figure in Spanish ecofeminism is Alicia Puleo, whose works are mainly concerned with philosophy and gender. Together with Mª Luisa Cavana and Cristina Segura, Puleo published in 2004 the book *Mujeres y Ecología. Historia, Pensamiento y Sociedad*. In this work the authors analyze how Spanish feminism seems to be too anthropocentric, which implies that Spanish feminists have focused too much on social structures and not enough on the natural world (Rey Torrijos 162). In Puleo's *Ecofeminismo para otro mundo posible* (2011) the author establishes a dialogue between feminism and ecology to make evident that a fruitful exchange between them is possible in the era of climatic change (Puleo, *Ecofeminismo* 21). Finally, Rey Torrijos refers to Carmen Velayos' s *Feminismo Ecológico. Estudios Multidisciplinares de Género* (2007), a compilation of articles by Spanish authors, as well as translations from other works—like Warren's—together with poems in Spanish. The Spanish research group GIECO, based in the Franklin Research Institute of the University of Alcala, has also published other works directly or indirectly related to ecofeminism. In the Summer-Autumn issue of the *Nerter* journal, devoted to ecocriticism and entitled *Ecocrítica* (2010), there are several articles on ecofeminist theory and literary analysis by members of GIECO. Some members of GIECO, together with important figures of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, took part in the special issue *Ecocriticism in English Studies* (2012) of the journal *Revista*

canaria de estudios ingleses. Finally, in Autumn-Winter 2013, the journal *Feminismo/s* of the University of Alicante will publish a special issue entitled *Ecofeminismo/s: mujeres y naturaleza* including articles of national and international renowned ecocritics and ecofeminists.

From its origins, ecofeminism has included political activism as well as theoretical works in philosophy, literature and language and science and technology, but also a wide variety of cultural work such as poetry, art, essays or novels (Plumwood, "Feminism and Ecofeminism" 48; Warren, *Ecofeminist* xiii). Barbara Gates also points out that ecofeminism can be said to involve both activism and ideology (15); and Irene Diamond and Gloria F. Orenstein comment that the term is used to "describe both the diverse range of women's efforts to save the Earth and the transformations of feminism in the West that have resulted from the new view of women and nature" ("Introduction" ix). Another issue on which all ecofeminists agree is the fact that ecological feminism or ecofeminism is based on the idea "that there are important connections—historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to both feminism and environmental ethics" (Warren, "The Power" 19). In her definition of ecofeminism Warren links two frameworks of thought that have functioned in separate ways, environmentalism and feminism, and she proposes to unify their concerns in order to put an end to the domination of women and nature. In so doing, Warren believes that ecofeminism emerges as a powerful movement since it "*provides a distinctive framework both for reconceiving feminism and for developing an environmental ethic which takes seriously connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature"* ("The Power" 19; emphasis in original). In her article with Jim Cheney, Warren defines ecofeminism in similar terms but using different words: "a feminism which attempts to unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement in order to bring about a world and worldview that are not based on socioeconomic and conceptual structures of domination" (Warren and Cheney 244). Nonetheless, Warren also believes that ecofeminism should not be limited to denouncing domination since it should also encourage alternatives and recommend solutions (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 43).

One of the most important premises of ecofeminism is that all forms of domination are interconnected, and not only those of women and of nature, but also the unjustified dominations of people of color, ethnic minorities, children and animals: that is, the groups traditionally labeled as the *other* (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 1). For ecofeminists, it is necessary to

analyze how nature is oppressed in order to understand how all the forms of domination are interconnected and interrelated (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 1-2). This way, ecological feminism/ecofeminism functions as an umbrella term that covers not only the domination of nature and women but all the rest of oppressive attitudes that still exist in our society. Regarding this idea of the umbrella term, Warrens highlights three adjectives that seem to describe the core of ecofeminism: feminist, ecological and multicultural. For her, ecological feminism is feminist in the sense that it aims at recognizing and eliminating all examples of male-gender bias. In so doing, ecofeminists would do away with patriarchy and could propose an alternative and non-oppressive framework of thought. Ecological feminism is ecological because one of its main goals is to value and to preserve ecosystems. Finally, ecological feminism can be described as multicultural because it analyzes the interconnections that exist among all forms of domination, for example, racism, classism, imperialism, colonialism or sexism (Warren, "Introduction" 1-2).

Because of the multicultural character of ecofeminism, ecofeminists challenge ecological and environmentalist movements that do not consider sexism, racism and classism part of the same interconnected pattern of domination that affects the environment. Chris Cuomo also believes ecofeminism is multicultural since it is placed "at the crossroads of feminist, anti-racist, and environmentalist movements, as well as critiques of capitalism, heterosexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression based on the dualistic construction and maintenance of inferior, devalued, or pathologized/naturalized Others" (24). These isms of social domination are the object of study for ecofeminists since in order to be eradicated they first need to be understood; and it is precisely the abolition of these oppressive patterns and behaviors which lie at the heart of ecofeminist goals (Li 289). Therefore, even if ecofeminism started as an intersection between ecology and feminism, with the passing of time it has also been influenced by both academic and political movements, literary and cultural criticism, and by "Third World women's and other postcolonial movements, peace movements, and science and technology studies" (Cuomo 34).

The diverse scope of ecofeminism is reflected by the multiple existing definitions. For example, in *Ecofeminist Philosophy* Karen Warren comments on her own understanding of the term ecofeminism by pointing out five main ideas that help to define the movement and its purposes. The first one is that there are important interconnections among all forms of domination. Secondly, she believes that it is important to understand these interconnections in order to find solutions for these dominations. Thirdly, she thinks that feminist philosophy should include ecofeminist ideas concerning the interconnections among all those beings

labeled as the *other*. In the fourth place, Warren comments that in order to solve gender conflicts we should include ecofeminist notions regarding the connections of women, human *others* and nature. Finally, Warren believes that solutions to environmental problems should also include ecofeminist ideas about the connections of all those labeled as the *other* (*Ecofeminist* 43).

Another example of how to define ecofeminism is provided by Janis Birkeland in her article "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice." Birkeland presents nine different statements that summarize her understanding of what ecofeminism is. She starts by pointing out that a fundamental social transformation is necessary. This means that if we want to end domination a reconstruction of the whole cultural framework of our society is needed: oppression, hatred and violence should be transformed into respect, pacifism and understanding. Then, Birkeland posits that in order to transform our worldview, we should learn to appreciate that "everything in nature has intrinsic value" (20). She also encourages humans to develop a more biocentric view of nature, thus acknowledging the interconnectedness of all living forms. By developing a biocentric perspective, Birkeland believes that humans would understand that their relationship with the natural world should not be one of exploitation but one of co-operation. In order to make effective the change in power relationships, it is necessary to eradicate hierarchy—and dualisms which sanction power-over relationships—and to develop an ethic based on mutual respect. Birkeland thinks that the process is as important as the goal because "how we go about things determines where we go" (20). Then, since what is personal is political, we must change the notion that the (female) private sphere is meaningless for the (male) public sphere. Finally, it is essentially necessary to eradicate patriarchy completely, since it is the base of the domination of women and nature (20).

Ynestra King also highlights four premises on which ecofeminism is built for her ("Toward and Ecological Feminism" 119-20). In the first place, ecofeminist principles are built on the assumption that for Western civilization nature is the *other*, which reinforces the domination of women since they are believed to be closer to nature. In the second place, ecofeminism is based on the idea that all forms of life are interconnected in a web and not in a hierarchy, and it is through the understanding of this interconnectedness of life that we humans may change our values by realizing that we are part of the web of life. In the third place, ecofeminism is built on the idea that diversity—whether human or non-human—must be maintained because environmental simplification is an ecological problem as important as

environmental pollution. Finally, if humanity wants to survive, it needs to restructure its relationship to nature by getting over the nature-culture dualism.

The definitions of these three authors help us understand that even if ecofeminists share the same goals, the way they formulate them differs. After having explored the origin and the premises of the movement, it is important to take into account its many manifestations depending on the interpretation of the relationship between women and nature, and on the role of women in their liberation.

3.1 TYPES OF ECOFEMINISM

Since ecofeminism emerged from the feminist movement, it is necessary to talk about ecofeminisms in plural rather than just about one type of ecofeminism. Some ecofeminists think that it is precisely this variety within ecofeminsm what makes of ecofeminism such "a catalyst for change in these troubled times" (Diamond and Orenstein xii). Despite the different types of ecofeminism that exist it is important to highlight that they all agree on the fact that women and nature are related in terms of domination and exploitation, and that only by working together both the ecological and the feminist movements will it be possible to end with all forms of domination. Then, although ecofeminists differ in the nature of the oppression of women and nature, the term ecofeminism works as an "umbrella" to cover all the different types of ecofeminism, just as ecofeminism aims at abolishing all forms of domination (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 21). In the following pages several types of ecofeminism will be explored following Carolyn Merchant's and Val Plumwood`s works, among others.

3.1.1 Liberal Ecofeminism

According to Carolyn Merchant, liberal feminism—from which liberal ecofeminism emerges—characterized the history of feminism from its beginnings in the seventeenth century until the 1960s ("Ecofeminism" 101). Liberal feminists have always argued that men and women do not differ in terms of rationality and that the reason why women have not been able to realize their potential is because they have not received equal educational and economic opportunities. Thus, liberal feminists have focused on achieving equality for women in terms of "suffrage, access to the professions and property rights" using the idea of "women's equality with men on the basis of their *sameness"* (Weedon 14). Regarding environmentalism, liberal ecofeminists believe that the environmental problems we face today are the result of the "overly rapid development of natural resources and the failure to regulate pesticides and other environmental pollutants" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 9).

Since for liberal ecofeminists the environmental crisis is the result of the uncontrolled exploitation of nature, they think that better science, and that better preservation and environmental laws are the appropriate measures in order to put an end, or at least to slow down the environmental crisis we face today. In order to do so liberal ecofeminists think it is necessary for women to have equal educational opportunities that will encourage them to

develop their potential. This way, women can become scientists, lawyers, and natural resource managers and, like men, women "can contribute to the improvement of the environment, the conservation of national resources, and the higher quality of human life" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 9). By participating along with men in scientific and legislative projects, they can work together to improve the environment and to develop a more healthy and respectful policy for the exploitation of natural resources and of the production of treatment of pollutants.

3.1.2 Cultural/radical Ecofeminism

Cultural feminism developed in the 1960s and 1970s with the second wave of feminism. The type of ecofeminism that grew out of this feminism emerged as a response to the idea that both women and nature have been mutually associated and devalued in patriarchy and that they could be liberated through direct political action (Merchant, "Ecofeminism" 101-102). Many cultural ecofeminists celebrate the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centered in goddess worship, the moon, animals, and female reproductivity. They also celebrate an era in prehistory when nature and women were held in high esteem because of their ability to give life. However, these ecofeminists reject the emergence of patriarchy, when mother goddesses were forgotten and substituted with male gods (Merchant, *Earthcare* 10). For this reason, cultural ecofeminists have recuperated the image of the goddess as a token for the liberation of women and nature. Cultural ecofeminists also propose to revalue, celebrate and defend what patriarchy has devalued, and that is the feminine, non-human nature, the body and the emotions (Plumwood, "Feminism" 49)

Nonetheless, cultural ecofeminism has its feminist critics because of its essentialism. Some feminists believe that by associating women with nature because of their reproductive function, women become devalued in a Western culture that devalues nature. Others believe that by emphasizing the female body and the female character of nature "radical ecofeminism runs the risk of perpetuating the very hierarchies it seeks to overthrow" (Merchant, "Ecofeminism" 101-102). Instead of the idea that liberal ecofeminists defend of women and men working together for the environment, cultural ecofeminists perpetuate the separation between genders by placing women closer to nature and not taking men into account. Radical ecofeminists believe then that the liberation of women will not be based on equal participation

in culture, but rather in subversion, resistance and replacement (Plumwood, "Feminism" 44). A major exponent of this type of ecofeminism is Judith Plant.

3.1.3 Spiritual Ecofeminism

Spiritual ecofeminists were among the first groups of ecofeminists that appeared in the United States. As it happens with ecofeminism itself, there are some differences among spiritual ecofeminists. For example, they disagree about the idea whether mainstream religious traditions can be reinterpreted to provide more ecological and nonsexist practices (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 31). One of the most important spiritual ecofeminists is the writer, activist and witch Starhawk. She is one of the ecofeminists who believe that ecofeminism has "an implicit and sometimes explicit spiritual base" ("Feminist" 174). However, her use of spirituality is not related to the Judeo Christian tradition. Instead, Starhawk's idea of spirituality is linked to the concept of the Goddess worshipped in prehistoric societies. Because the Goddess was part of everything, spirituality was thus embedded in all material things, from human beings to animals, trees or even rocks. However, as religions evolved, spirituality was separated from the material world and elevated to a realm that only human beings could understand. For this reason, many spiritual ecofeminists believe that one of the premises of ecofeminism, or at least of an "earth-based spirituality" is immanence.

Since they believe that the Goddess is embodied in the living world, every creature has inherent value, a value "that cannot be diminished, rated, or ranked, that does not have to be earned or granted" (Starhawk, "Feminist" 177). This notion challenges our vision of the world since we tend to consider things depending on their usefulness to us. It also challenges the way we conceive power. Since every creature has inherent value, power is no longer seen as power-over but as power-from-within. Another important aspect for spiritual ecofeminists, and one that all ecofeminists share, is that of the interconnection of all forms of life. By acknowledging this interconnectedness, humans are invited to feel compassion towards the other inhabitants of the planet and to the planet itself. For Judith Plant, it is precisely one of the tasks of ecofeminists to develop the ability "to take the place of the other when considering the consequences of possible actions," because that is the best way we can feel we are all part of the same web of life (Plant, "Searching" 156). By identifying ourselves with other creatures, we are able to shift our anthropocentric view of the world and to develop a biocentric one, as ecofeminists and other environmentalist ask us to do.

3.1.4 Social Ecofeminism

Social ecofeminism grows out of feminism and of the social ecology that Murray Bookchin exposes in books such as *The Ecology of Freedom.* Social ecofeminism proposes to liberate nature and women from the paradigms of Western thought by restructuring society in what Merchant describes as "human, decentralized communities" (*Earthcare* 13). Social feminism, from which social ecofeminism emerges, attacks the social impositions of patriarchy upon women: "marriage, the nuclear family, romantic love, the capitalist state, and patriarchal religion" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 14). Although social ecofeminists acknowledge the biological differences that exist between men and women, they reject the idea that these differences "entail gender hierarchies and domination" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 14). In order to achieve their goal, social ecofeminists believe that it is necessary to overturn the economic and social hierarchies that make of life a market society. In order to do so and to liberate women and nature, biological determinism and gender constraints must be erased from our society. Social ecofeminism wants women to liberate themselves and become part of society as "free participants in public life and local municipal workplaces" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 14). Whereas cultural ecofeminism can be described as anti-technology, social ecofeminism understands that some of the technology used to destroy nature could be also used to preserve it (Bookchin 20). By rejecting and overturning the hierarchies that had placed women in a subjugated position, they can liberate themselves and take part in building a new social order. Major exponents of social ecofeminism are Val Plumwood and Karen Warren and it is their works, and thus social ecofeminist theories which I will be using in this dissertation.

3.1.5 Socialist Ecofeminism

Carolyn Merchant does not describe socialist ecofeminism as a movement in itself but as "a feminist transformation of socialist ecology" (*Earthcare* 15). One possible reason for stating so is that socialist feminists have not been much concerned with environmental issues. Socialist feminists think that the source of male domination over women is rooted in "the complex social patterns called capitalist patriarchy, in which men bear the responsibility for labor in the marketplace and women for labor in the home" (Merchant, "Ecofeminism" 103). Socialist feminists adapted Marxist language to talk about patriarchy, so for them women

became "a class defined by their sex" (Weedon 18). To this idea, socialist ecofeminists add that the environmental problems are the result of the capitalist patriarchy and the ideology that nature "can be exploited for human progress through technology" (Merchant, "Ecofeminism" 103).

According to Merchant, socialist ecofeminism "assumes that non-human nature is the material basis of all of life and that food, clothing, shelter, and energy are essential to the maintenance of human life […]. Nature is an active subject, not a passive object to be dominated and humans must develop sustainable relations with it" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 15). Although socialist ecofeminists are aware of nature as a resource, they realize that it should not be exploited without taking into account the consequences so they believe that a more sustainable relationship with it is possible. Socialist ecofeminism does not only seek to liberate both women and nature from the constraints of patriarchy, but its goal is to encourage a social revolution that would liberate women, nature and also working-class people. Therefore, a socialist feminist environmental ethic would involve "developing sustainable, non-dominating relations with nature and supplying all peoples with a high quality of life" (Merchant, "Ecofeminism" 105).

Socialist ecofeminism is especially concerned with the environmental issues that affect working-class women, women from developing countries, and women of color. Some of the practical examples of how socialist ecofeminism comes in to practice can be found in the women's *Chipko* (tree-hugging) movement in India to protect the trees from being cut since forests are their first means of sustenance; or in the women's Green Belt movement in Kenya that is reforesting areas of Africa and has planted more than a 2 million trees in 10 years (Merchant, "Ecofeminism" 105). These two examples show how the interests of women and of nature and intertwined so that each of them benefits from the liberation of the other.

As a socialist ecofeminist herself, Carolyn Merchant believes that whereas cultural ecofeminism has explored in detail the connections between women and nature, socialist ecofeminism has more potential for the critique of domination. Merchant's book *The Death of Nature*—published in 1980—is probably the earliest socialist ecofeminist text. In this book, Merchant details the role of nature throughout the history of Western societies focusing on how humans stopped being considered part of nature to become its exploiters. According to Merchant, the Scientific Revolution changed the image of nature as Mother Earth, a source of reverence, to become a passive entity from a mechanical point of view. Merchant adds that because women had been associated with nature, this change in the perception of the Earth resulted in the subjugation of women. Catriona Sandilands points out that in Merchant's

subsequent texts, she moves her focus from the death of nature "to the destruction of the biosphere by capitalist forces and relations of production" (58). In these texts Merchant also analyzes how reproduction has also been exploited by capitalist production.

As we can see, ecofeminists can be divided into different categories. Ecofeminist critic Patrick D. Murphy realizes that ecofeminism does not represent a "stable, clearly defined theory adhered to or acknowledged by all practitioners of a feminist ecology or an ecological feminism" (*Literature* 49). We can find liberal ecofeminists, cultural or radical ecofeminists, spiritual ecofeminists, social ecofeminists and socialist ecofeminists, and although they disagree on the basis of the domination of women and nature, all agree "that there are important conceptual connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature" (Li 272). Even though the goals of the different types of ecofeminism differ in the ultimate objective of political action, "their shorter-term objectives overlap" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 26; "Ecofeminism" 105). All types of ecofeminism share the objective of ending patriarchy and other oppressive conceptual frameworks that have supported the domination of women and nature, but also that of human-*others* and non-human nature. As Merchant posits, all ecofeminists also share the "common goal of restoring the natural environment and quality of life for people and other living and non-living inhabitants of our planet Gaia" (*Earthcare* 26).

3.2 CRITIQUE OF ECOFEMINISM

Since ecofeminism has become widely known in recent years, it has provoked a variety of responses. Those who support it believe that ecofeminism is an innovative movement that criticizes the logic of domination while proposing "a new era of gendered and natured relations" (Sandilands xvi). But ecofeminism has also received several attacks, and the better way to explore them is to start by considering the term itself. There are some women that oppose the very word "ecofeminist" because they claim that since feminism is already against oppression, there is no need to use a different word (Vance 132). However, feminism has solely been focused on gender issues and on the image of women and its position in society without including the environmental component. Therefore, ecofeminism emerges as a term that includes the oppression of women but also that of nature, ethnic minorities and non-human animals, among others.

The term ecofeminism appeared in the 1970s and since then it has spread all around the world through different manifestations. Because of its relative youth and its mixture of theoretical thinking, literary analysis and activism, ecofeminism has been sometimes criticized as being "partial or incomplete, as if it were the shadow side of a 'real' theory" (Birkeland 21). Since ecofeminism is concerned with the figure of the *other* and with the domination to which the *other* is subjected, many ecofeminists do not find this criticism surprising at all. Janis Birkeland, for example, points out that "feminine" value systems and those of tribal people have tended to be neglected and unworthy of the term "culture" (21). Therefore, ecofeminism may be inferiorized in the same way that the *other*—ecofeminists' main concern—has been.

Catriona Sandilands highlights another criticism against ecofeminism. Since this movement focuses on the relationship of women and nature, some women have criticized the use of the label "woman" as being too generalist since it has been historically used to cover all female experiences, thus offering perhaps a narrow approach. Since ecofeminism defends and respects multiplicity and difference, it would be logical for ecofeminists to study in more detail the category of woman. Sandilands acknowledges the claim of women coming from a variety of surroundings in which certain women themselves have been oppressors. These oppressed women challenged the category "woman" because of "its Western and white, middle-class, and (eventually) heterosexual bias and because of its overtones of biological determinism" (Sandilands 110). Women of color and of ethnic minorities have complained

that they do not identify with the image of woman that some ecofeminists offer because they themselves believe that they have been doubly oppressed for being women and not being white. But there are other ecofeminist whose works and activism have been precisely focused on the situation of women that somehow do not fit in the category of "woman" described by Sandilands in the quote before—that is, non-Western, non-white, low-class and or/homosexual women. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, who are especially concerned with the situation of Indian women, are an example.

Radical/cultural ecofeminism has also been seen as controversial because of how it formulates its critique of androcentism. Whereas "feminine" values such as instinct or nurturing are positively viewed, the so called "masculine" values such as reason or scientific knowledge are despised. For this reason, radical ecofeminists are usually described as being against science. The problem of this "anti-scientism" is that it supports the sexist belief that women are not as good at scientific knowledge as men are. This anti-scientist perspective has also been criticized by feminists who think that some scientific developments have helped women's liberation: "Feminists critics of this position have argued that wholesome rejections of technology tend to be regressive and unhelpful and do not do justice to the sometimes positive role of technology in women's liberation—particularly in the area of contraception and fertility" (Weedon 49). Liberal and social ecofeminists also reject this anti-scientism on the basis that men and women are equal, so that given the same educational opportunities, women are able to participate in scientific research as well as men.

Essentialism has also been used as an argument posed against ecofeminism. For ecofeminists the close relationship between women and nature is primarily based on how both have been oppressed in patriarchal societies. But cultural/radical ecofeminists focus on the relationship of women and nature as resulting from their shared capacity to bring forth life. In this sense, Catriona Sandilands comments that "early ecofeminism relied on a notion of woman's essential difference from man in order to highlight the ways in which a woman's standpoint on nature could produce less exploitative, more nurturing, and more harmonious human relations with nonhuman (and human) nature" (110). However, most ecofeminists find this standpoint controversial since it entails reproducing social hierarchies but women on top, or as Greg Garrard posits: "radical ecofeminism would then appear to present us with a mirror-image of patriarchal constructions of femininity that is just as limited and limiting" (24). Besides, this supposed closeness to nature has been criticized because it has limited "women's value, whatever their individual circumstances, to discourses of motherhood with which most women did not fully or even partly identify" (Weedon 12); but also because the

idea of women being closer to nature relies on the idea that there is an essential female nature, and it is precisely this idea that has been damaging to women, according to Chris Cuomo (*Feminism* 114). Thus, reproducing this image may result in limiting women to their intuitive nature instead of expanding their capacities (Biehl 15). As commented previously, most ecofeminists reject essentialism because of its inconsistency with ecofeminist principles and with ecology: the idea of women being closer to nature has no logic considering that ecofeminists believe that all life is interconnected, therefore, no group of persons can be closer to nature than another (Birkeland 22; Gates 20-21).

A related debate is the relationship between environmentalism and ecofeminism. Most ecological movements claim that the root of the environmental crisis we face today is our anthropocentric vision of the world. For this reason, deep ecologists and other environmentalists, including ecofeminists, propose a change in our way of conceiving the world. Ecofeminism is very critical of nonfeminist environmentalisms, because ecofeminists think that these movements focus on the natural world without realizing that the social and the environmental are interconnected. For this reason, ecofeminists, like other environmental movements concerned with social justice, have a wider scope regarding nature, so they are also concerned with issues such as "environmental health, the preservation of wilderness and economic development" (Cuomo, *Feminism* 19).

Among environmental movements, deep ecology is especially significant if we compare it to ecofeminism. In his article "Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: the Emerging Dialogue," Michael Zimmerman states that despite all the different approaches to deep ecology, all deep ecologists agree that "the industrial pollution, species extinction, biospheric degradation, and nuclear annihilation facing the Earth are all symptoms of anthropocentrism" (139-40). As a result of this, deep ecologists ask us to realize that human beings are no more, but also no less, important than all the other creatures than inhabit our planet. This way deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of nature, and it claims that nature and human beings have been alienated one from the other because of Western philosophy. Plumwood states that deep ecologists locate the roots of the environmental crisis in "the separation of humans and nature," and she adds that the solution that deep ecologists propose is "the 'identification' of self with nature" ("Nature" 163). In her analysis of deep ecology Plumwood also points out how this environmental movement has failed to observe the connections of ecology with feminism but also with socialism ("Nature" 173). She further comments that the failure to consider those connections is "the result of an inadequate historical analysis and understanding of the way in which the inferiorization of both women and nature is grounded

in rationalism, and the connections of both to the inferiorizing of the body, hierarchical concepts of labor, and disembedded and individualist accounts of the self" ("Nature" 173).

Although both ecofeminism and deep ecology share the goal of ending the domination of nature, they envision different causes for the environmental crisis in our world. For deep ecologists, "anthropocentrism or *human*-centeredness" is the cause of degradation of the environment; but ecofeminists think that it is because of "androcentrism or *man*-centeredness" (Zimmerman 142). Feminists criticize deep ecology as a predominantly male movement in the sense that they do not recognize what ecofeminists believe is "the *real* source of the domination of nature: patriarchy" (Zimmerman 138). In anthropocentrism, humans distinguish themselves from nature—and position themselves in a higher level—"on the grounds of some alleged quality such as possession of an immortal soul or rationality" (Garrard 23). In androcentrism, however, it is men who are placed over women "on the grounds of some alleged quality such as larger brain size, and then assumes that this distinction confers superiority upon men" (Garrard 23). Thus, in androcentrism women and nature are both placed in a subjugated position, from which they can liberate themselves by subverting androcentism—and thus patriarchy—and not only anthropocentrism. Another reason why ecofeminists criticize androcentrism rather than anthropocentrism is that although they agree with deep ecologists in that humans "have no right to reduce the richness and diversity of life forms except to satisfy vital human needs," they question to what extent the so-called "vital needs" are shaped by patriarchy (Spretnak 12).

But just as ecofeminists have criticized deep ecology for its focus on anthropocentrism instead of on androcentrism, deep ecologists have criticized ecofeminism because of its feminist bias. They believe that by focusing on both feminist and environmental issues, ecofeminism fails to fight against the domination of nature as properly as if it were its sole concern – as it is in environmentalist movements. For example, deep ecologists point out that any form of domination which has not to do with nature is of no concern for the environmental movement; therefore, from this point of view, feminism has nothing to add to the environmental movement (Plumwood, *Feminism* 17). For ecofeminists, this point of view is limited because they defend the possibilities of an alliance between environmentalism and feminism. Karen Warren, for instance, insists that "any feminist theory *and* any environmental ethic which fails to take seriously the twin and interconnected dominations of women and nature is at best incomplete and at worst simply inadequate" (Warren, "The Power" 19; emphasis in original). Also Patrick Murphy recognizes the relationship between feminism and ecology when he claims that

> …to be a feminist one must also be an ecologist, because the domination and oppression of women and nature are inextricably intertwined. To be an ecologist, one must also be a feminist, since without addressing gender oppression and the patriarchal ideology that generates the sexual metaphors of masculine domination of nature, one cannot effectively change the world views that threaten the stable evolution of the biosphere, in which human beings participate or perish. (*Literature* 48)

Ecofeminists thus believe that ecology and feminism are related in the sense that both should work together to liberate women and nature from their subjugated position, and this is the ecofeminist response to those environmentalists that believe that feminism is of no concern for ecology.

Nonetheless, despite the differences between ecofeminism and deep ecology, they both seek to end the domination of nature. These two movements share the commitment to transform Western thought so that humans live in harmony with their environment. Both deep ecology and ecofeminism recognize the value of nature per se and not in terms of its usefulness to human beings. Then, and because of the several similarities between ecofeminism and deep ecology, many environmentalists think that what is needed is cooperation and trust, so that both movements can work together in order to free the Earth "from the burden of domination and exploitation" (Zimmerman 154). Also Carolyn Merchant believes that by putting together the goals of ecofeminism and deep ecology, new values and social structures may develop resulting on "the full expression of both male and female talent on the maintenance of environmental integrity" (*Earthcare* 75).

3.3 INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN WOMEN AND NATURE

All ecofeminists draw on the idea that women and nature have long been associated for different reasons, and that this association is "deep-seated, in a way that not only perpetuates the subordination of women but is at the root of the ecological crisis" (Biehl 13). Linda Vance also comments on how women and non-human nature are related in their domination by stating that in patriarchy men are "the knowers and shapers" whereas women are perceived as "known and shaped objects," and that it is precisely that oppression women share with nature (133). However, this association based on domination is a relatively recent one, since nature has been seen associated with women since prehistoric times in the image of Mother Earth: "a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 77). At the same time, nature has also been associated with a disorderly woman who brings violence, storms, hurricanes, droughts, chaos and other natural disasters (Merchant, *Earthcare* 77; Li 277).

One of the main ideas in most ecofeminist writings is that the domination of women and nature is the product of the conception of both women and nature as the *other* in Western culture (Biehl 14). This is because in patriarchy, nature has been considered an alien force to be controlled and, similarly, women have also been perceived as the *other*, as the subordinated sex to be dominated (Kheel, "Heroic" 244; Li 281). Moreover, biological determininism has also placed women closer to nature, and the reasons for doing so are enumerated in Sherry Ortner's article "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" First, she states that women have been associated with nature because their bodies place women closer to nature, whereas man's physiology frees him to devote himself to cultural projects. In this argument, Ortner follows Simone de Beauvoir's idea that because of her biology, a woman is "more enslaved to the species than the male" so "her animality is more manifest," thus she is considered to be closer to nature (Ortner 74). Second, Ortner explains that woman's body and functions place her in social roles that are considered inferior to those of man, such as the nurturer or the healer. Finally, Ortner comments that "woman's traditional social roles, imposed because of her body and its functions, in turn give her a different *psychic structure*" that is considered closer to nature (73-74; emphasis in original). Sherry Ortner rejects the idea that women's supposed feminine personality—what she refers to as *psychic* structure—is generated by biological factors; instead she states that this personality is generated by social-structural arrangements that derive from how women's biology has been conceived in

patriarchy (82). Most ecofeminists also reject this notion since it limits women and reinforces "those male-created images that define women as primarily biological beings" (Biehl 11). After having taken into account the most common reason why women have been associated to nature—biological determinism—it is interesting to consider some of the other associations that ecofeminists refer to in their exploration of the association between women and nature.

The first type of interconnection that we can find between women and nature is the historical one. One of the authors that have explored in detail this historical interconnection is Carolyn Merchant, who believes that the root of the domination of nature and women lies in the shift from an organic worldview to a reductionist one, focusing on how the scientific revolution affected negatively both women and nature. In prehistoric times, Mother Earth was praised in the cult of the goddess as the creator of all. Nature was seen as a female entity and the earth was conceived as a nurturing mother, "sensitive, alive, and responsive to human action" (Merchant, "Mining" 102). In these prehistoric civilizations, women were not subordinated to men since they lived according to a partnership ethics, and the Earth was worshipped and regarded as the creator of life, so it was not "an object for exploitation and domination" (Eisler 23) since "one does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold, or mutilate her body" (Merchant, "Mining" 100). As Merchant points out, as long as the Earth was imagined as a mother or as a living and sensitive organism, it was free from exploitation and degradation (Li 277).

The Stoics, who emerged in Athens during the third century B.C. and in Rome through the first century A.D., also thought of the world as a living and intelligent organism, and for them "God and matter were synonymous" (Merchant, "Mining" 102). The conception of the planet as a living organism lasted until the Renaissance, when people saw all things as permeated by life, so there was no method to designate the inanimate from the animate ("Mining" 105). But at the end of the seventeenth century, the scientific revolution shifted the image of the Earth from a living organism to a passive entity. Merchant and other ecofeminists find Francis Bacon's ideal of technological mastery over nature as a root cause of the modern conception of the natural world which is conclusive to its exploitation. Merchant illustrates how the scientific revolution affected the natural world with the following words: "the nurturing mother was subdued by science and technology" (Merchant, "Mining" 116). Similarly, for ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, Bacon's scientific ideal was based on the dichotomies of male/female, mind/matter, objective/subjective and rational/emotional and on "a conjunction of masculine and scientific dominating over nature, women and the non-west" (16). For this reason, some cultural/radical ecofeminists have developed an anti-

science position preferring old traditions and believing that scientific research is aimed at controlling nature and women's bodies. However, liberal and social ecofeminists have adopted a more open-minded position regarding nature. These ecofeminists believe that with both women and men working together in science, they can make useful discoveries to help the natural world.

The second type of interconnection that has been identified between women and nature is the conceptual one and ecofeminists like Val Plumwood believe that the domination of the *other* may be based on conceptual terms. Warren comments that ecofeminists like Val Plumwood believe that the basis of the structures of domination lies "in hierarchically organized value dualisms" and in "an exaggerated focus on reason and rationality" (*Ecofeminist* 24). Thus, the domination of women and nature is the result of a conceptual framework that has placed women and nature together as opposed to men and culture, not as in a dichotomy, but in a hierarchical dualism. Therefore, whereas men and culture are highly regarded and placed in the upper position in the hierarchy of this pattern of thought, women and nature—along with other human *others*—are relegated to a secondary position. Another reason for the domination of women and nature lies in the conceptual split between reason and rationality and nature and matter. In prehistoric societies, nature was believed to have a spiritual value, but the attitude towards nature changed and the spirituality was ascribed to something immaterial while the physical world became a resource.

Those who analyze conceptual interconnections between women and nature point out that the roots of the domination of nature have their origin in classical Greek philosophy and the rationalist tradition. On the one hand, Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy conceived nature as inert, as mindless mater. For Martin Kheel, the Aristotelian notion of purpose and function especially shaped "the Western world's instrumental treatment of women and nature" ("Heroic" 246). Aristotle believed that the world was arranged in a hierarchical way, and within this hierarchy, each being strives to fulfill its goals. On the other hand, Plumwood thinks of rationalism as the culprit because of the implication that humans' ability to reason elevates them over nature and over non-human animals. For Plumwood, the rationalist-empiricist model is about human-centredness, or anthropocentrism (*Environmental* 48). Plumwood continues saying that knowledge is not based then on "a collaborative effort between knower and known" because the knower "monopolises agency and reason" (*Environmental* 48). This monopolization entails a complete hyperseparation between knower and known, that is, between white males and human and non-human others and nature.

Other ecofeminists have established the connection between women and nature in real experiences, what is called an empirical interconnection. These ecofeminists usually focus on how women, people of color, the underclass and children suffer in a special way the environmental destruction. In fact, the ecofeminist movement in the United States was highly influenced by grass root female activists who criticized the environmental catastrophes of Love Canal and who rejected nuclear warfare. Since women have been traditionally associated with the role of taking care of the family, the pollution of the land and deforestation usually affects them in a special way. In the case of the underprivileged and of people of color, their relationship with environmental catastrophes has been much explored by environmental justice movements. For example, some environmental justice activists have complained about how the hurricane Katrina and its aftermath devastated areas that were mainly populated by African Americans.[7] As Peter Wenz points out, there are empirical studies that show how in the United States poor people and people of color "are more likely than other to live in areas of health-impairing pollution" (201). According to Wenz, these groups labelled as human *others* are prone to suffer from environmental disasters and pollution because of their lack of political power (202).

There are also examples of how empirical interconnections work among women from developing countries. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies have focused their work on how women and nature are related "through their social role in providing sustenance" (Shiva 42). In most developing countries, women are those in charge of providing sustenance for their families so they are the most affected by environmental degradation. For instance, when forests are cut down to create cash crops women are specially affected because the basic sustenance of their families disappears along with biodiversity. For this reason, these women have promoted demonstrations and campaigns against deforestation such as those performed by Chipko women and the Green Belt Movement in Africa.

Socioeconomical interconnections between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature have also been found by ecofeminists like the physicist and Chipko movement activist Vandana Shiva. Both Shiva and Maria Mies, authors of the book *Ecofeminism*, argue that women's bodies and labor, as well as nature, are colonized "by a combination of capitalism and patriarchy (or capitalist patriarchy)" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 26). The term capitalist patriarchy implies that men are the ones given access to and control of resources whereas women and nature are seen as exploited resources themselves. Maria Mies

[7] See Bullard and Wright.

points out that while ironically women and nature are exploited and relegated to a subservient role, the wealth of ruling-class men would not exist without women and nature (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 26).

If we consider linguistic interconnections, philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein have argued that "the language one uses mirrors and reflect one's concept of oneself and one's world" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 27). Many Western languages still reflect patriarchal values in the form of expressions that reinforce sexist and racist attitudes. Karen Warren offers the example of expressions that animalize women in a patriarchal culture, because if animals are already seen as inferior to human, by animalizing women the result is that women's inferior status is reinforced and authorized. Warren mentions some examples by pointing out that women are often referred to as bunnies, old hens, whales or queen bees (*Ecofeminist* 27). She also talks about the consequences of feminizing nature in patriarchy, which reinforces and authorizes once more the domination of nature. For example, Warren comments on the image of Mother Nature and how it is usually associated with ideas of rape, mastering, control or conquest (*Ecofeminist* 27). One of the first authors who have analyzed the implications of feminine metaphors to refer to the Earth, especially by focusing on the references to the American continent as Mother and as Virgin, is Annette Kolodny in her work *The Lay of the Land* (1975). In this work Kolodny also explores how this identification between woman and nature has influenced the ecological crisis of our days. Considering all the above information, the conclusion is that in order to end with the domination of women and nature, it would be necessary to eliminate the sexist and racist bias of some of our language expressions, because those only perpetuate the oppressive attitudes to which ecofeminism opposes.

Many ecofeminists analyze in women's nature writing the interconnections among those labeled as the *other* (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 29), looking for symbolic and literary interconnections. It has not been until the 1990s when ecofeminism has started to be taken into account in literary studies, and little by little critics have begun "to develop the insights of ecofeminism as a component of literary criticism" (Murphy, *Literature* 48). In order to study the interconnections between nature and women, some ecofeminists are reappraising the literary canon both studying images of women and nature that were neglected, and reclaiming female writers that have not been included in the literary canon. For Margarita Carretero González, ecofeminsm can be considered an interesting lens through which we can approach literature—especially when we explore how women and nature are represented in literary works and which metaphors are used to refer to them (184). Ecofeminist literary criticism also promotes those literary works that embody and demonstrate ecofeminist principles and

practices (Murphy, *Farther* 94). These ecofeminist literary works are important because they help to envision an alternative reality "in which biotic differences and gender differences are celebrated in their diversity and heterarchy rather than used as justifications for domination, exploitation, and extinction" (Murphy, *Farther* 94).

Spiritual and religious interconnections between women and nature have also been studied. Elizabeth Dodson Gray in her book *Green Paradise Lost* (1979) claims that the creation account that appears in the Bible is the basis of the destructive hierarchy of beings that we can find in our society. According to this hierarchy that Dodson makes reference to, the higher the being is placed, the closer it is to what is spiritual and superior (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 31). Therefore, in this hierarchy human beings are located in the highest areas, whereas nature and animals, because of their materiality and their lack of reason, are placed at the lower levels. For this reason, since humans consider themselves superior to animals and nature, they may feel that their manipulation and exploitation of nature is justified. Martin Kheel comments on the Jewish-Christian tradition regarding the situation of nature. For him, the Genesis account of Creation is somehow guilty of the current instrumental and hierarchical conception of nature (Kheel, "Heroic" 246). According to historian Lynn White Jr. both Judaism and Christianity state that the universe was created by God, who had planned all creation "explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes" (White 9). This statement then implies that the Judeo-Christian account of creation may be the basis of anthropocentrism in Western societies. However, this idea is somehow controversial since some critics believe that the Bible does not explicitly state that humans should control nature, but that its interpretation depends on the choice of words in the translation.

Those ecofeminists who analyze the epistemological connections between the domination of nature and the domination of women are concerned about the idea of knowledge in general (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 33). For example, they challenge the notion of knowledge as something objective, the idea that the "knower" is objective and detached from the reality he or she is observing. They also challenge the conception of nature as a "passive object of knowledge" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 33). In fact, what these ecofeminists challenge are the premises of Baconian scientific thought. For Bacon, nature was something inert to be observed, a passive object to be studied and control by men. This pattern of thought goes clearly against ecofeminist principles, which state that all forms of life are interconnected and interdependent, so it becomes impossible for an observer of nature to be completely detached

from it. For Val Plumwood, the knowledge of nature should not be based on human interests but on the idea that nature is "something to be known for its own sake" (*Environmental* 50).

The political interconnections between women and nature can be clearly seen in the origins of ecofeminism itself. In the United States ecofeminism has always been linked to grassroots political activism related to environmental issues that specially concern women. For example, the ecofeminist grassroots activists usually consider women's and environmental health issues, as well as how women are affected by the developments in science and technology, but they also focus on the treatment of animals, and in anti nuclear and anti-militarism activism (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 35). Since these interconnections are based on political responses to empirical facts, the ecofeminists that explore them are also concerned about the empirical interconnections stated before.

Finally, regarding the ethical interconnections of all types of domination Karen Warren states that "ecofeminist philosophers argue that the interconnections among the conceptualizations and treatment of women, other subordinated humans, animals and (the rest of) nature require a feminist ethical analysis and response" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 37). The goal of an ecofeminist environmental ethics would be to develop a series of theories and practices that would improve the relationship between humans and between humans and nature eliminating the male-bias of patriarchal thought.

Although Karen Warren talks about several different types of interconnections between women and nature, many of these interconnections are clearly related. For example, empirical and political interconnections are related in the sense that political activism many times arises from empirical facts that demonstrate that women, children and the underprivileged suffer environmental catastrophes and environmental degradations in a special way. Most of the other types of interconnections are the result of a historical process in which Judeo-Christian conceptions, the scientific revolution and rationalism, have resulted in a hierarchical framework of thought in which white men have been placed over all the other creatures of the planet, and over the planet itself. Literary works, language, attitudes and cultural values usually reflect this historical process perpetuating and reinforcing the hierarchy. However, ecofeminists actively aim at providing an ecofeminist environmental ethics that would put an end to value-hierarchical thought and to oppressive frameworks.

Therefore, ecofeminists draw on the idea that women and nature are somehow connected, whether politically, epistemologically, biologically, symbolically, and so on. However, the problem does not lie in the interconnection of women and nature but in the consequences of this interconnection. Most ecofeminists believe that the association of

women and nature has had negative consequences for both, but they also adopt a positive perspective by stating that this association can be restructured so that it becomes positive. In order to do so, some feminists have proposed to affirm those values that have usually been associated with women and femininity (Birkeland 19). Most ecofeminist agree on the claim that women's association with nature gives them "a special stake" in recovering the relationship between humans and nature and, in so doing, "solving today's environmental problems" (Li 272). For this reason, Greta Gaard and other ecofeminists believe that the best way to envision our relationship with the natural world would be by means of ecofeminist spirituality and by ecofeminist environmental ethics.

3.4 GAIA

As it has been illustrated in the previous section, the relationship between women and nature has been understood in different ways. One of the most important associations between women and nature—and one which is especially relevant in Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*—is that of the image of Mother Earth, sometimes referred to as Gaia. The figure of Terra Mater, Mother Earth or Gaia has been prominent in several cultures throughout history, since prehistoric societies to indigenous peoples. Cultural ecofeminists and other ecological groups reclaim this image for their causes believing that in so doing Western societies "will curb the ruthless violation of the natural world" (Gaard, "Ecofeminism and Native" 301). According to Martin Kheel, by recuperating the image of the goddess Gaia, these ecofeminists establish a "spiritual connection with the natural world," while at the same time they oppose the "patriarchal notion of a male sky god" with that of a female earthly and material goddess ("Heroic" 251). Similarly, Charlene Spretnak, one of the feminists who during the 1970s reclaimed Gaia as an earth-mother, thought that women and nature could be liberated together "through the recognition of Gaia as both the earth and the female aspect of the godhead couples with the removal of patriarchal constructions" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 4).

Gaia was also the name that the novelist William Golding suggested to scientist James Lovelock as a name for the hypothesis he was working on (Garrard 172). Although the Gaia hypothesis did not become popular until 1979 with the publication of Lovelock's book *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth,* he had been exploring the hypothesis for several years. Lovelock's hypothesis, supported by biologist Lynn Margulis, states that all life on the planet is interconnected , that "that the mean global temperature, the composition of reactive gases in the atmosphere, and the salinity and alkalinity of the oceans are not only influenced but regulated, at a planetary level, by the flora, fauna, and microorganisms" (Sagan and Margulis 353). The important outcome of this hypothesis is the idea that the Earth is a complex set of systems working together, "a self-regulating system, analogous to a living organism" (Garrard 173). What Riane Eisler points out as the most striking aspect about the Gaia hypothesis in relation to ecofeminism is that it was "a scientific update of the belief system of Goddess-worshipping prehistoric societies" (Eisler 26). This way, in the 1970s feminists and scientists seemed to agree in the use of Gaia as a metaphor for a new understanding of how all life on Earth was intertwined. As Carolyn Merchant posits in *Earthcare,* this new hypothesis

reinforced the concept of Mother Earth that had been reclaimed by feminists and that was "central to the cultures of indigenous peoples" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 4).

At first the hypothesis of Gaia worked as a good metaphor for the Earth, but little by little, the connotations of this naming became controversial both for environmentalists and feminists. Ecophilosophers praised Lovelock's hypothesis because it envisioned the Earth as a living being, but later they disliked the conclusion that the Earth, because of its "self-regulating mechanisms" was able to endure exploitation and other damaging human behaviors (Kheel, "Heroic" 251). If, according to Lovelock, the Earth monitors itself and is able to recover from harmful practices, then the implication is that humans can continue damaging the Earth, producing pollution and spreading deforestation. For example, in *Literature, Nature and Other* Patrick Murphy criticizes Lovelock's notion of the Earth taking care of industrial pollution, since that entails that there is no need for environmentally-friendly attitudes (*Literature* 24). Also Charlene Spretnak and Val Plumwood reject the concept of the self-regulating system of the Earth and joke with the idea of Gaia as a servant cleaning the planet after humans' mess (Merchant, *Earthcare* 5).

Another problem with the Gaia hypothesis is related to its very name. William Golding told Lovelock that Gaia could be a good name for his hypothesis, but in choosing the name of the Greek Earth goddess, he did not consider the possible implications of his choice. The problem with the name Gaia is that we associate it with the image of a woman, which is reinforced even more by the conception of nature as feminine. Although at first Lovelock's choice of Gaia may have been aimed at explaining the relationship of humanity and the biosphere while opposing anthropocentrism, it did reinforce androcentrism by choosing what Murphy calls "the female side of the duality passive" (*Literature* 60). Murphy also comments that Lovelock's chosen name is problematic because "Gaia designates a female entity; designating an entity female in a patriarchal culture guarantees its subservient status" (*Literature* 61). In a similar way, Greta Gaard says that the idea of Gaia, as that of Mother Earth, "dooms nature to a female way of being, which in Western culture means a subordinate way of being" ("Ecofeminism and Native" 305). She also believes that if women were not treated in a sexist way in Western culture, this feminization of nature could imply a whole different meaning. Other authors like Catherine Roach have also commented on the image of Mother Earth and its negative connotations: "engendering the Earth as female mother" in patriarchal culture "will not achieve the desired aim of making our behavior more environmentally sound, but will instead help to maintain the mutually supportive, exploitative stances we take toward our mothers and toward our environment" (52). Roach also adds that

this issue of engendering nature or of naturalizing women highlights one of the main points of ecofeminism: "the way we think about and treat the environment is related to the way we think about and treat women" (52).

Despite the favorable first reactions to the Gaia hypothesis, its connotations became problematical for both environmentalists and feminists. On the one hand, by stating that the Earth is able to heal on her own, it is implied that there is no need to control human behavior regarding the environment. Besides, and as Carolyn Merchant states, if Gaia is "a self-regulating homeostatic system" she can find humans expendable, and that undercuts "social justice issues relating to the diversity of peoples and regions" (*Earthcare* 5). On the other hand, although ecofeminists celebrated the Gaia hypothesis because it scientifically supported the idea that all life is interconnected, they rejected the patriarchal bias in the choice of the name as well as its implications towards women and nature, since it reinforces the essentialism that have placed women and nature in a subjugated position in patriarchy. The terms "Mother Nature" and "Mother Earth" present similar problems because even though they are sometimes used as slogans by environmental activists, they help to perpetuate the image of our planet as a passive and nurturing creature that will always provide for her children, no matter what they do.

3.5 OPPRESSIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

One of the main goals of ecofeminists is to put an end to all forms of oppression. In order to do so, ecofeminists think it is important to explore the different types of domination in order to find patterns and similarities (Cuomo, *Feminism* 30). The domination and subordination of the *other* is one of the most visible consequences of an oppressive conceptual framework, which is described as "a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 46). A conceptual framework is considered oppressive if it "functions to explain, maintain, and 'justify' relationships of unjustified domination and subordination" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 46). Even though most Western societies no longer support any form of legal domination, we can still find many examples of how oppressive conceptual frameworks survive in even the most advanced societies in the form of violence against women, the exploitation of children, the pollution of nature, or of racist attitudes against immigrants, among others.

In her analysis of oppressive conceptual frameworks, Warren posits five common features. First, oppressive conceptual frameworks involve value-hierarchical thinking, which means that the beings placed in the higher levels of the hierarchy have more value than those in the lower levels. Second, an oppressive conceptual framework encourages oppositional value dualisms; these are "disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as exclusive (rather than inclusive) and oppositional (rather than complementary) and that places higher value (status, prestige) on one disjunct than the other" (*Ecofeminist* 46). Third, power is understood as 'power over', so those in the higher levels of the hierarchy exercise their power over those in the lower levels. Fourth, in oppressive conceptual frameworks privilege is seen as belonging to those in the higher levels. Lastly, oppressive conceptual frameworks sanction a logic of domination, which is "a logical structure of argumentation that 'justifies' domination and subordination" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 47). For Greg Garrard and other ecocritics and ecofeminists, the logic of domination lies at the core of the "discrimination and oppression on grounds of race, sexual orientation and class as well as species and gender" (Garrard 26).

As Warren points out, oppressive conceptual frameworks involve value-hierarchical thinking. For Murray Bookchin, the term hierarchy refers to "the cultural, traditional and psychological systems of obedience and command" and "the domination of the young by the

old, of women by men, of one ethnic group by another, of 'masses' by bureaucrats who profess to speak in their 'higher social interests,' of countryside by town, and in a more subtle psychological sense, of body by mind, of spirit by a shallow instrumental rationality, and of nature by society and technology" (4). Bookchin also comments that hierarchies are at the core of Western society, and in fact, it would be impossible to conceive our world without some sort of hierarchical organization. However, we have to bear in mind that not all hierarchies are negative, since they are usually most helpful in organizing thought and priorities. For example, Karen Warren believes that not all hierarchies are bad and she comments on the Up-Down power relation of parents and children when parents take care of their children so that they do not suffer pain. But she also comments that this power-over is inappropriately exercised when leaders use it to keep those in the subordinated position "from realizing or exercising their civil rights" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 199). Therefore, hierarchical thought results unproblematic as long as it has no value associated to those in the higher levels, justifying thus the subordination of those occupying the lower levels of the hierarchy.

One of the oppressive conceptual frameworks that ecofeminists have most analyzed and attacked is that of patriarchy. In fact the very term "oppression" has been mostly associated to the subordination of women in patriarchy (Li 284). Janis Birkeland defines patriarchy as "the male-dominated system of social relations and values" (17). Karen Warren expands the definition of patriarchy to encompass

> ... *institutions* (including policies, practices, offices, positions, roles), *behaviors*, and *ways of thinking* (conceptual frameworks), which assign higher value, privilege, and power to men (or what historically is male-gender identified) than to that given to women (or to what historically is female-gender identified). (*Ecofeminist* 64; emphasis in original).

Therefore, patriarchal societies are characterised by placing a higher value on what is considered masculine, whereas what is feminine is seen as something inferior, justifying this way its subordinated position. In patriarchy, women's roles belong to the domestic sphere and are considered as inferior to those of men, who are placed in the public sphere (Ruether 72). Karen Warren explores the situation of women in patriarchy and she comments that it is not that women have no power or no privilege in patriarchy, but even if they have power and a valued status, "they are excluded from political and economic institutions of power and privilege" (*Ecofeminist* 64). Therefore, even though certain women have enjoyed privileged positions throughout history, the problem is that women as a group have been relegated to a secondary position regarding institutional power (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 64).

Ecofeminists do not only explore the interconnection between the exploitation of women and the domination of nature in patriarchal societies, but they also link these two oppressive situations to all the examples of domination, that is, they see patriarchy at the core of all the forms of human domination and exploitation (King, "Healing" 110). In fact, those groups that are labeled as the *other* in oppressive conceptual frameworks have also been usually associated with supposedly feminine characteristics such as passivity, emotionality, irrationality and dependence (Li 274). The interconnection of all forms of domination is the reason why ecofeminists seek to develop an alternative non-oppressive conceptual framework. But as Riane Eisler points out, the alternative to patriarchy is not matriarchy since that would only perpetuate the domination of a group considered the other in relation to the group in power (28). Instead, ecofeminists propose a *partnership* society or model: "a way of organizing human relations in which beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species—the difference between female and male—diversity is *not* equated with inferiority or superiority" (Eisler 28).

Another important feature of oppressive conceptual frameworks is that they encourage oppositional value-dualisms. Chris J. Cuomo comments that dualisms have always existed in phallocratic thought, and some of the most well-known examples are those of masculine and feminine, yin and yan, male and female, light and dark or culture and nature (*Feminism* 136). It is then clear that human beings, in their attempt to classify all things, have tended to construct the world in terms of opposition (Eagleton 146). But feminists and ecofeminists do not attack oppositions as something dangerous in our culture, since dualisms have always existed. Instead, they attack dualisms whenever they entail value-hierarchical thinking, because they believe that those types of dualisms are "endemic to systems of dominance and subordination typified by Western power discourses" (Cuomo, *Feminism* 136).

The type of dualism that ecofeminists reject is the one in which one of the members of the pair has more value than the other member. Val Plumwood defines this dualism as "the process by which contrasting concepts are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive" ("Feminism" 44). In value-dualisms one of the elements of the pair is subordinated to and dominated by the other member of the pair, which has more value. Besides, these dualisms are constructed as oppositional and exclusive, that is, the two elements of the pair are regarded as completely different and opposed the one to the other. For Plumwood, these dualisms are more than a relation of dichotomy since they imply a value-hierarchical structure in which "the qualities (actual or supposed), the culture, the values and the areas of life associated with the dualised other are systematically and

pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior" (*Feminism* 47). Chris J. Cuomo also described dualisms as "*false* dichotomies" in the sense that they are constructed "to maintain a power structure" (136). For her, as for other ecofeminists, dualisms present exclusive and oppositional pairs that usually become extremes or caricatures without considering what exists between the two elements of the pair (Plumwood, *Feminism* 136; Heller 74).

Since feminists and ecofeminists think that value-dualisms perpetuate power-over relations and value-hierarchical thinking, they have been interested in studying dualisms in order to dismantle them (Eagleton 146). In fact, many of them believe that the male/female opposition is "the underlying paradigm" that is hidden in the rest of dualisms (Eagleton 147). For Hélène Cixous, reality is divided in hierarchical oppositions that imbricate philosophy, literature and our very conception of the world (Cixous 101). In patriarchy, this division of reality in dualisms is made according to gender. Masculinity and all the values and attributes associated with it are more highly regarded than feminine values. For examples, attitudes usually associated with masculinity such as competitiveness, domination or calculation are seen as advantages; whereas traditional feminine attitudes of nurturing, caring or accommodating are regarded as disadvantages (Birkeland 24). Besides, in patriarchal societies women have been associated with nature, and both have been perceived as the *other* to men, who are associated with culture; and for ecofeminists, these two oppositions – women/nature vs men/culture – are the basis of dualistic thought.

Apart from the dualisms of male/female and culture/nature, Val Plumwood points out other contrasting pairs such as: reason/nature, mind/body (nature), master/slave, reason/emotion (nature), civilized/primitive, human/nature (non-human), subject/object, self/other (*Feminism* 43). For Val Plumwood some of these pairs correspond to the main forms of oppression that we can find in Western societies: gender (male/female), class (mental/manual), race (civilized/primitive) and nature (human/nature) oppressions (*Feminism* 43). Looking at the list of dualisms, all the elements on the left side of the pair are usually associated with men or male attributes, whereas the elements of the right side are those that usually are regarded as related to women: emotion, body, nature, object and the *other*. In this sense, not only women and nature are related, but they are also associated with the notion of "object", therefore, both are seen as instruments, and valued "only to the extent that they are useful to Man" (Birkeland 24). This instrumentalism is related to the Cartesian concept of nature as a "resource," as an entity separated from men. For Vandana Shiva, it is this dualism between man and nature the one that underlies the view of nature as: "(a) inert and passive; (b) uniform and mechanistic; (c) separable and fragmented within itself; (d) separate from

man; and (e) inferior, to be dominated and exploited by man" (40-41). In fact, all these attributes ascribed to nature, are usually associated with women, slaves, ethnic minorities, indigenous people, animals and all other entities regarded as the *other*.

But feminists and ecofeminists do not only criticize and attack these value-dualisms, because they also seek to rewrite them so that they stop encouraging domination and subordination. In so doing, the complexity of the world would be recognized and the "the biological and cultural diversity that sustains all life" would be valued (Diamond and Orenstein, Introduction xi). In her criticism on dualisms, Val Plumwood comments that in order to overcome dualistic thinking, women "must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of culture as men" ("Feminism" 46). She also admits that in order to do so, both men and women must challenge the gender dualism as well as "develop an alternative culture which fully recognized *human* identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature" ("Feminism" 46). This paradigmatic change would result in the acknowledgement of nature as part of human beings and as part of culture, and not as a "resource" or something alien to humans.

Finally, oppressive conceptual frameworks sanction a logic of domination, that is, "a logical structure of argumentation that 'justifies' domination and subordination" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 47). In her description of what a logic of domination is, Warren highlights four main features. First, a logic of domination both explains and justifies dominating relationships, so it involves a value system based on the premise that superiority justifies subordination. Second, differences and diversity are understood as a justification for domination. Third, historically in patriarchal societies oppressive conceptual frameworks have justified the domination of women and nature, as well as of those consider the *other*. Ecofeminists believe that reason and rationality have been unfairly used to sanction the feminization of nature and the naturalization of women, thus resulting in their inferior position in relation to "male-gender identified culture" (*Ecofeminist* 50). Finally, Warren states that oppression "consists in institutional structures, strategies, and processes whereby some groups (Downs) are limited, inhibited, coerced, or prevented from mobilizing resources for self-determined goals by limiting their choices and options" (*Ecofeminist* 55).

3.5.1 A Logic of Domination

Ecofeminist Val Plumwood has also explored the logic of domination that underlies oppressive attitudes and domination. In her analysis, she has outlined five different practices that are common in the situations of domination and subordination: backgrounding, hyperseparation, incorporation, instrumentalism and homogenization. According to Val Plumwood, these five attitudes take place in different oppressive behaviors such as colonization, classism, racism, sexism or anthropocentrism, among others.

Backgrounding

Backgrounding results from a relationship in which the superior uses the inferior benefitting from him/her/it while denying this dependence at the same time: "a complex feature which results from the irresoluble conflicts the relationship of domination creates for the master, for he attempts both to make use of the other, organizing, relying on and benefiting from the other's services, and to deny the dependency which this creates" (*Feminism* 48). In this form of domination, the higher valued being denies his/her dependence on the less valued being by "making the other inessential" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 48). This pattern can be found, for example, in slavery. The wealth of the master depends on slaves and on their work, but he does not admit that. In a similar way, women's roles of caretaking and nurturing have been considered as less important than those of men, even if they are basic for the survival of the species. In the case of nature, many human beings deny their dependence on the natural world. Nature could exist without human beings, but humans would not be able to survive without the resources that nature provides. Ecofeminists believe then that this situation would change if each creature, whether human or non-human, was valued in itself and not in its usefulness for a supposedly superior being.

Radical exclusion/hyperseparation

The second attitude that Plumwood identifies in a logic of domination is called "radical exclusion" or "hyperseparation." According to this behavioral pattern the superior and the inferior are characterized as two completely separated groups. As Plumwood states, it is not only that the *other* is treated as inferior, as part of a lower and different order of being, "differentiation from it demands not merely distinctness but radical exclusion, not merely separation but hyperseparation" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 49). Therefore, because the *other* is

seen as alien to the superior being, it is not only placed in an inferior level, but it is also radically excluded from the superior's order of being.

In her definition of this attitude towards the *other,* Plumwood differentiates between the ideas of distinctness and radical exclusion. In the case of distinctness, the focus is on a "single characteristic which is different, possessed by the one but not the other" and that guarantees difference in terms of identity (*Feminism* 49). However, when radical exclusion or hyperseparation occur, this different characteristic is emphasized whereas the shared qualities are considered inessential. For example, biological differences have placed women in an inferior position because of their reproductive role and their supposed weakness. Another important example is that of the relationship between humans and animals. According to Descartes, nonhuman animals have no capacity to reason and that argument has been used to justify animal mistreatment and animal experimentation, and it is the main cause of the human/nature dualism. In the case of nature, human beings have believed for centuries that they were not part of nature. In this conception of nature as something alien to humans, as something external, as a resource, we can find a clear example of hyperseparation. Ecofeminists and other environmentalists think that this hyperseparation from nature has resulted in the ecological crisis of our days since it entails our inability to understand our place in the world.

> To the extent that we hyper-separate ourselves from nature and reduce it conceptually in order to justify domination, we not only lose the ability to emphathise and to see the non-human sphere in ethical terms, but also get a false sense of our own character and location that includes an illusory sense of autonomy (Plumwood, *Environmental* 9)

For this reason, environmentalists ask humans to start considering themselves as part of nature instead of radically excluding it from their lives.

Incorporation/relational definition

Incorporation or relational definition stands for the kind of attitude in which an inferiorized individual/group tends to be identified or named by the individual/group in power. For Val Plumwood, this is another of the patterns that tend to appear in a logic of domination and it consists of defining "the underside of a dualistically conceived pair […] in relation to the upperside as a lack, a negativity" (*Feminism* 52). An example of incorporation is the situation of women that Simone de Beauvoir criticizes, that is, that women are usually defined not in themselves but in relation to men. Val Plumwood echoes de Beauvoir's words when she states that woman "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he

with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (*Feminism* 52). In cases of incorporation, the *other* loses autonomy and is defined in relation to the superior being as it happened in slavery times, when slaves where named after their masters, being thus incorporated and losing their identity. One can also claim that in some countries when a woman loses her family name after marriage and she is given her husband family name it may be a case of incorporation.

Relational definition can be defined as a kind of incorporation in which the *other* is defined in relation to the self as a lack or absence: "defining the other only in relation to the self, or the self's needs and desires" (*Feminism* 52). In this type of incorporation the *other* is perceived simply in relation to the master "he or she is not encountered fully as an independent other, and the qualities attributed or perceived are those which reflect the master's desires, needs and lacks" (*Feminism* 52). In the case of nature, the environment is seen simply as a resource, and it is considered to the extent it satisfies human needs, without taking into account nature as an entity in itself with its own needs.

Instrumentalism/objectification

In a logic of domination, instrumentalism or objectification usually takes place. In instrumentalism, the inferior being becomes an object or an instrument and its existence is based on satisfying the superior's needs. According to Plumwood, instrumentalism/ objectification occurs when "those on the lower side of the dualisms are obliged to put aside their own interests for those of the master or centre" and when "the lower side is also objectified, without ends of its own which demand consideration on their own account" (*Feminism* 53). Instrumentalism is especially relevant in the relationship between human beings and nature. With the scientific revolution nature stopped being a motherly figure to become a passive entity to be analyzed and exploited. Nature then became a resource to fulfill human beings and humans never took into consideration nature's own needs and cycles. This continuous degradation and exploitation of the natural world as a result of its objectification has derived in an ecological crisis. As a response to the consequences of the instrumentalism of nature, environmental movements have stated that humans should develop a more ecocentric attitude so that the planet starts being considered ifor itself and not as a resource for human's purposes. Similarly, non-human animals are objectified when they are used in experiments that only benefit human beings.

Homogenization

The fifth pattern that Plumwood identifies in a logic of domination is homogenization, and it consists of treating all the members of the "inferior" group as if they were equal; that is, in the process of homogenization they stop being individuals and become a homogeneous group. Plumwood relates homogenization to colonialism, when conquerors considered the colonized as all alike, and not as individuals (*Feminism* 55). In her description of homogenization Val Plumwood recalls her childhood and how "non-English 'foreign' immigrants were treated. Their differences denied, they were all dismissed as 'aliens', 'wogs', or 'reffos' (refugees); the multiplicity and dignity of their cultures and languages ignored" (*Feminism* 53). Plumwood uses these memories as an example of what homogenization involves, that is, the loss of identity. Homogenization is also related to the idea of stereotyping since when we forget about individuals and talk about a group as a whole, we tend to use stereotypes that may not be real. Ethnic minorities tend to be homogenized by majority groups, and this homogenization usually focuses on the worst aspects of that group. For example, we tend to consider immigrants from certain countries with suspicion even though it is only a small percentage of the immigrant community which commits crimes. In the case of women, homogenization has led to much debate even within feminists groups. To talk about the category of woman in general is controversial because in patriarchy women have been usually considered in general terms and not as individuals.

In the case of nature and of non-human animals, Plumwood comments that they are all seen alike "in their lack of consciousness," and that the "diversity of mindlike qualities" found in them is ignored (*Environmental* 107). For Plumwood, the homogenization of nature entails its interchangeability so that natural resources are not perceived in their uniqueness. Besides, she comments that humans tend to underestimate "the complexity of nature" (*Environmental* 107) thus neglecting its rhythms, cycles, and needs.

3.6 ECOFEMINIST ETHIC

Both Karen Warren and Val Plumwood have analyzed in detail the structures ofdomination that underlie oppressive conceptual frameworks, providing a complete analysis of the patterns and behaviors associated with the subjugation of the considered *other*. The features above mentioned are the ones that we usually find in a society based on an oppressive conceptual framework, as in the case of patriarchy. For Warren, these types of society are what she calls unhealthy social systems. Unhealthy social systems tend to be rigid and closed systems in which rules and roles are determined by power-over hierarchies, usually with no possibility of negotiation (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 205). But Warren also comments on healthy social systems, in which problems are acknowledged and resolved, and relationships are usually egalitarian and reciprocal; these can be described as systems "in which individual members and groups get their basic needs met" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 205). Considering all this, we can conclude that healthy social systems lie at the core of ecofeminism, since it strives for social models in which value-hierarchies are eradicated and in which difference is valued and not used to justify subordination.

In the ecofeminist attempt to replace oppressive conceptual frameworks with healthy social systems, they highlight some of the values that would characterize such a social model: "diversity, interdependence, sustainability, cooperation, and renewal" (Vance 134). Referring to this desirable change of paradigm, Karen Warren talks about an ecofeminist ethic, which she describes as based on eight concepts. Firstly, this ethic is not static, since it is "conceived as theory-in-process," that may change over time. Secondly, an ecofeminist ethic has no place for any kind of social domination or oppressive behavior such as sexism, racism, classism, and so on. Thirdly, an ecofeminist ethic is a "contextualistic ethic" in the sense that it encompasses the concerns of "entities located in different historical circumstances"—and with entities she refers to humans but also to animals and nature, and how they relate with each other. Fourthly, and in relation to the previous notion, an ecofeminist ethic is also an inclusivistic ethic because it takes into account the diversity of perspectives of women and other *others.* Fifthly, an ecofeminist ethic does not provide an objective point of view because it would be impossible; instead, ecofeminists prefer to acknowledge the viewpoints of those who have traditionally been oppressed, since their voices have never been taken into account. Sixthly, an ecofeminist ethic gives importance to values that have usually been considered unimportant because of being associated with femininity, for example, values of care, love, nurture, and so on. Seventhly, an ecofeminist ethic invites to reconceive what it means to be

human. Finally, an ecofeminist ethic "also reconceives the traditional Western philosophical concept of reason" (*Ecofeminist* 101). Traditionally, reason has been associated with human beings and has separated them from the rest of creation, that is, from animal and natures. Therefore, reason has been used to justify human's domination of nature. In her ecofeminist ethic, Warren prefers to use the term intelligence because it encompasses both humans and some animals as well. Besides, intelligence can also refer to emotional intelligence, and not only to rational intelligence (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 99-101).

Other authors do not talk about an ecofeminist ethic but they use the expression partnership ethic or model. A partnership model is based on many of the ecofeminist principles mentioned in this section, although it would not be the first time in history to find such a social model operating since they seemed to have existed in prehistoric times. In these societies, spirituality was present in every living creature so the material and the spiritual were the same thing. Because in these societies goddesses were usually worshipped, the place of women was not one of subordination but one of cooperation with men. Carolyn Merchant proposes to somehow reclaim this type of society in which humans are equals among them and also equals with non-human nature, eliminating thus the subordination and domination of oppressive social systems (Merchant, *Earthcare* 8). In this partnership model, humans and non-human nature would coexist in a balanced and "more nearly equal relationship" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 56).

In her description of a partnership ethic, Merchant points out four important concepts. The first one is the "enquiry between human and nonhuman communities," that is, to learn from one another about each group's needs and wellbeing. The second one is the "moral consideration for humans and nonhuman nature," something neglected in the anthropocentric and rationalist models. The third concept is the "respect for cultural diversity and biodiversity," since oppressive systems tend to neglect richness and uniqueness through the homogenization of human and non-human *others*. Finally, the partnership ethic includes "women, minorities, and nonhuman nature in the code of ethical accountability" (*Earthcare* 217). These four basic ideas associated with the partnership ethic Merchant proposes imply that both humans and non-human nature are equal partners. Besides, in response to the ecofeminist goal of ending all forms of domination, a partnership ethic recognizes women, minorities and non-human nature as whole subjects – and not objects – with full agency. This kind of ethic, therefore, has two main components derived from the four concepts exposed before and those are "a homocentric social-interest ethic of partnership among human groups and an ecocentric ethic of partnership with nonhuman nature" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 218).

But, despite its ecocentric character, this ethic also includes the idea that both the needs of nature and the basic needs of human beings have to be taken into account (Merchant, *Earthcare* 218). Therefore, in spite of the oppression and exploitation that has characterized the relationship of humans and the environment, this model invites humans and nature to work together, treating the other as an equal and recognizing its needs.

The important aspect of the partnership ethics is that it encompasses feminist, social, ecological and scientific concerns. Although it draws on women's experiences and their connections with the environment, this ethics does not imply that women have a special relationship with nature, but it states that both women and men have to take part as equal partners, and as equal partners with nature. From a social perspective, a partnership ethic also takes into account the connections between economic systems in order to find new economic forms that would make it possible for all human beings to see their needs fulfilled without degradating the environment. Finally, this partnership ethics also draws on scientific discoveries that help humans cooperate with nature, as in the use of renewable energies (Merchant, *Earthcare* 222).

In his book *The Ecology of Freedom*, Murray Bookchin also depicts what for him would be an ecological society, giving an account that resembles to some extent the description of the partnership ethics provided by Merchant. Bookchin started imagining how the relationship of humans with nature could be improved by means of a free society based on ecological principles. He started imagining a small community in which technology would improve the environment by means of solar and wind installations. One of the main features of this community is that it would be more or less autonomous with its organic gardens and using local natural resources. After reflecting on the ecological characteristics of this community, Bookchin focuses on the social and political features of his community, which would be based on decentralization and self-sufficiency and self-empowerment (2). But Bookchin's ecological society would also follow the ecofeminist idea that in order to improve the relationship among humans and with the environment it is necessary to rethink the conceptual framework and turn it into a non-oppressive and healthy one. For this purpose, Bookchin believes that it is not enough "to remove the symptoms of our crises," but that we need also "to extirpate the hierarchical orientation of our psyches, not merely remove the institutions that embody social domination" (340).

Whether we choose Merchant's partnership model or Bookchin's ecological communities, both social models represent an alternative to patriarchy with all the members of the society cooperating among themselves and with nature. For Karen Warren, the only

way to be able to live according to ecofeminist principles is by recognizing our commonalities and differences. In so doing, "we will be poised to create genuinely respectful, nonviolent, care-based, intentional communities where commonalities and differences are just that – commonalities and differences" (*Ecofeminist* 204). Because in these communities difference does not become a justification for subordination, respect is one of its main features.

The purpose of examining the features of oppressive conceptual frameworks as opposed to healthy social systems based on ecofeminist principles is to provide a theoretical background to my analysis of Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*. In my study of these two novels I will explore the two conceptual frameworks portrayed in the novels—the human and the alien one. In so doing, the analysis will focus on how alternative conceptual frameworks are established as a contrast to oppressive social systems, and on how individuals adapt to alternative environments in which the perspective of self/*other* is always changing.

IV. THE AUTHORS AND THEIR WORK

4.1 BIOGRAPHY OF OCTAVIA BUTLER

Octavia Butler is one of the prominent figures of SF of our time. Of humble origins, she became not only an acclaimed writer by both SF readers and critics in Women and African American Studies. She was an African American woman writing in a white male domain who was able to use SF metaphors to explore issues of race, gender, power and the environment in order to reinterpret and reconsider our world (Kenan 495).

Octavia Estelle Butler was born on June 22, 1947 in Pasadena, California. Her father, who worked as a shoeshine, died when she was very young and Octavia and her mother went to live to her grandmother's farm (Stewart n.p.). Butler's mother worked hard as a maid so that she could study and find a good job. Butler said in an interview with Charles Rowell that her mother's big dream for her daughter was to get a job as a secretary and be able to sit down, while her response was: "My big dream was never to be a secretary in my life" (Rowell and Butler 51).

Octavia was an only child as well as a solitary girl. When she was at school, the other children did not get along with her because she was very tall—six feet in her teens (Davis n.p.)—and because she was a very shy girl who took refuge in books (Stewart n.p.). Since childhood she enjoyed reading books and "magazines such as *Amazing*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and *Galaxy* and soon began reading all the science fiction classics. She was particularly impressed by Ursula Le Guin's *Dispossessed* and the first of Frank Herbert's *Dune* series (Gates and McKay 2480).

Her interest in writing science fiction grew after watching the B-series movie *Devil Girl from Mars.* Butler has declared on several occasions that that movie worked as a kind of inspiration for her because, as she explained in an interview, the movie was so silly in her opinion that she thought she could "write a better story than that" (Rowell and Butler 54). Although Butler started writing at a very young age—by the time she was ten she used to carry a notebook to write in it whenever she could (Rowell and Butler 52)—she took a variety of different jobs that had nothing to do with writing, such as dishwasher, telemarketer or potato chips inspector (Fox n.p.).

Her mother's hard work enabled her to go to university. In 1968 she got an associate degree from Pasadena City College and then she enrolled at California State University (Los

Angeles) and at the University of California (Los Angeles), where she took a class from the well-known American SF writer Theodore Sturgeon (Rowell and Butler 59). Whenever it was possible for her she took writing classes to improve her writing skill: "I took writing courses wherever I could find them. If somebody said 'writing course' and 'free' in the same sentence, I was probably there" (Rowell and Butler 58). So, in 1969 she attended a workshop in Los Angeles called the Writers Guild of America West Open Door Workshop, where she met Harlan Ellison, who was by then "a legend in the science fiction genre whose work includes scripts for *Twilight Zone, The Outer Limits* and *Star Trek* (Stewart n.p.). Later on, Harlan Ellison introduced her to Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Workshop, which is a six-week writer's workshop (Snider n.p.). Once in Clarion, Butler attended Samuel Delany's classes, one of the few African American Science Fiction writers apart from herself (Davis n.p.).

Butler's first novel *Patternmaster* was published in 1976. It was the first novel of a group of five known as the *Patternist* series, and the money she received for it allowed her to go on holidays for the first time in her life (Sanders n.p.). From that moment on, Octavia Butler became one of the few well-known African American SF writers, winning several times the most important awards in the Science Fiction world. In 1984 she received a Hugo Award for her short story "Speech Sound," and in 1985 she received the Hugo, Nebula, Locus, *Science Fiction Chronicle Reader,* and the Science Fiction Writers of America Awards for her novelette, "Bloodchild" (Geyh, Leebron and Levy 554). In 1995 she received a $295,000 MacArthur grant—also known as 'genius grant'. One of the interesting aspects of receiving this grant is that she is the only SF writer in the list of recipients throughout its history. This grant made her more visible to readers and made it possible for her to buy her first house (Marshall n.p.). In 1999 she won the Nebula Award for the second time, on this occasion for her novel *Parable of the Talents*; and in 2000 she won a lifetime achievement award in writing from the PEN American Center (Fox n.p.). In spite of her shyness and her solitary character, Octavia Butler repeatedly took part in readings and writers' conferences, especially Clarion West, one of the most important places in her beginnings as a writer. She was also member of the advisory board of Seattle's Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame (Marshall n.p.).

For several years Octavia Butler suffered from congestive heart disease. Because of this, she had to take some medication that made it very difficult for her to concentrate on her writing, as her editor Dan Simon stated (Stewart n.p.). This was possibly the reason why she never completed her Parable trilogy. Eventually, and as a result of her disease, on February

24th 2006, Octavia Butler died as a result of the injuries sustained after falling outside her home at Lake Forest Park, Washington. She was only 58 years old.

4.2 OCTAVIA BUTLER'S SCIENCE FICTION

Octavia Butler died young, but she left her voice in twelve novels, some short stories as well as in interviews and speeches. Despite suffering from writer's block towards the end of her life, her works place her as one of the most important figures in SF of the second half of the twentieth century. Steve Barnes, another African American SF writer and friend of Butler, considers her "the most important science-fiction writer since Mary Shelley" (Heffter n.p.). An important aspect of Butler as a writer of SF is her ability to use the genre to deal with a variety of issues such as racism, slavery, sexism, sexual violence, and the environment (Grewe-Volpp 153). For these reasons, her novels and short stories have also been analyzed from the perspective of gender or race.

Octavia Butler published her first novel, *Patternmaster*, in 1976. This novel, along with *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor* (1978), *Wild Seed* (1980), and *Clay's Ark* (1984), are called the *Patternist* series and were compiled in the book *Seed to Harvest* (2007). These novels describe how humanity has evolved into three groups: the Patternists, with special psychic and telepathic abilities, who are connected through the "pattern," something like a mental net; the Missionaries, a religious group outside the pattern who want to preserve the human form as the image of God; and the Clayarks, humans that became mutants because of an infection with an alien virus from outer space.

In 1979 her novel *Kindred* was published after some problems. Several publishers rejected the manuscript alleging that they could not understand how a SF novel could be set on a plantation in the antebellum South (Marshall). The novel tells the story of an African American woman living in the 1970s who travels back in time to the antebellum South whenever her white ancestor is in peril. She realizes that she has to save his life if she wants to exist in her own time; during these time travels to the past she witnesses all the cruelty and the lifestyle of slavery. *Kindred* is not only studied as a SF novel—although it is not strictly SF since "the element of time travel in the novel is based on inexplicable psychically induced phenomena, rather than on a scientific paradigm" (Melzer 41)—but the novel is also analyzed in African American and Women Studies. Butler has stated several times that she got the inspiration for this novel from her own mother's experiences. When Butler went with her mother to some of her jobs, she disliked the way her mother was treated by her bosses, and she could not understand why her mother did not rebel against their behavior. Then, she realized that her mother endured those situations so that she would be able to eat and live

more or less comfortably (Rowell and Butler 51). In *Kindred* she somehow wanted to show that their African American ancestors—who worked as slaves—were not cowards or pathetic people for not rebelling against injustice but, as she expressed in her interview with Joshunda Sanders, they "were heroes because they were using what they had to help their kids get a little further" (n.p.).

Some years after *Kindred*, Octavia Butler won a Hugo Award for her short story "Speech Sounds" (1984), and a year later her novella "Bloodchild" won several of the most prestigious SF awards. In "Bloodchild," as in *Clay's Ark* and in the *Xenogenesis* series, Butler explores the relationship between human and alien by focusing on issues of "reproduction, power, and social categories of gender and race in a metaphorical framework of cross-species reproduction" (Melzer 41).

In 1987 Butler published the first novel of what would be known as the *Xenogenesis* series: *Dawn* (1987). *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989) completed the series, and in 2000 the three novels were compiled in a novel called *Lilith's Brood*. Butler herself has declared that she got the idea for the *Xenogenesis* series from Ronald Reagan when he was defending that nuclear weapons were for the safety of the country and that the United States could win a nuclear war against the Soviet Union. Butler did not agree with the idea but she realized that most Americans believed Reagan's words and she thought that "if people believed this, then there must be something wrong with us as human beings" (Geyh, Leebron and Levy 555). The *Xenogenesis* books tell the story of a group of humans who survive a nuclear war and who are rescued by an alien civilization called the Oankali. The Oankali—skilled genetic engineers—offer humans a gene trade in order to establish hybrid colonies since they believe that humans on their own will destroy themselves once more because they are naturally flawed. In these novels, as in some of her works, Butler explores issues of colonialism and proposes "alternative ways of dealing with difference" (Melzer 36). As other SF writers had done before her, Butler uses the image of the alien to deal with otherness and with the idea of human evolution by breeding with an alien species, analyzing the consequences of these genetic manipulations (Melzer 40-41).

Following the publication of the *Xenogenesis* series Octavia Butler published the first novel of a group of two called the *Parable* series: *The Parable of the Sower (*1993) and *The Parable of the Talents* (1998). These novels are set in the middle of the 21th century in a postapocalyptic California after a civil war. The female protagonist of the first novel establishes a utopian community based on a religion she has invented and that is called Earthseed. This woman is an interesting character because she suffers from what she calls

"hyper-empathy syndrome," a syndrome than increases her empathy towards those who suffer pain. In these novels, Butler uses the Earthseed religion-based community to portray "utopian alternatives to racist, sexist, and capitalist systems" (Melzer 41). A key aspect in these novels is the importance of the environment; in fact, as she stated in an interview with Charles Rowell: "the ecology, especially global warming, is almost a character in *Parable of the Sower*" (Rowell and Butler 61). In an interview for *Democracy Now*, Butler described these novels as "cautionary tales" because they somehow reflect what could happen "if we keep misbehaving ourselves, ignoring what we've been ignoring, doing what we've been doing to the environment" (Butler, González and Goodman).

Butler's last novel, *Fledging* (2005), tells the story of a black-skinned female vampire. In her interview for *Democracy Now* Butler explains that the protagonist is a dark-skinned vampire because she has been genetically engineered so that she can survive solar rays (n.p.). The melanin of her body has been modified so that she can live in the outside world for 24 hours a day without being burnt by the sun (Butler, González and Goodman n.p.). In this novel Butler deals once more with issues of gender and race, two concepts that are essential in the author's work.

Therefore, Butler's SF offers a wide range of prototypical SF tropes such as the alien, time travel or shape-shifters, as metaphors to explore otherness and what it means to be human. Margalit Fox's article in the *New York Times* includes Butler's quote on her use of SF prototypical characters to explore human nature: "When I say these things in my novels, sure I make up the aliens and all of that, but I don't make up the essential human character" (Fox n.p.). Octavia Butler realized how useful SF was in order to explore social issues, as she recognized in an interview with the *New York Times* (Fox n.p.), and that is why her work is not only approached from SF studies but also from "black women's writing, and anticolonial and feminist debates" (Melzer 36).

Many critics have noticed the importance of race and gender in Butler's fiction (Wolmark, *Aliens* 28). Her black heroines, some of them studied in Ruth Salvaggio's article "Octavia Butler and the Black Science-Fiction Heroine," challenge the assumption that women are secondary characters in SF by achieving their independence and becoming the protagonists of Butler's novels. Through the use of black heroines Butler interweaves race and gender discourses since she believed that "it was just as important to have equal rights for women as it was to have equal rights for black people" (Kenan 501).

Thus Butler's work, as we can see, may be analyzed from a variety of approaches. Her novels and short stories deal with issues of gender, race and the environment proposing

alternative relationships with otherness and analyzing the idea of humanness. For Patricia Melzer, not to include Octavia Butler in colonial or gender studies because her work is labeled as SF would be a loss for those discourses. In her writings, Butler makes use of SF imagery such as aliens, telepathy or time travel "to explore the implications for identity and difference of boundary breakdown" (Wolmark, *Aliens* 37). At the same time, since Butler's work is considered popular, her writing is able "to project creative and innovative ways of approaching gender and race relations that move beyond debates that involve only 'mainstream' literature" (Melzer 38). Butler's work has already been analyzed from different approaches such as African American or gender studies, but in this dissertation I propose to carry out a new analysis of her writing, in particular of the *Xenogenesis* series. I want to analyze these three novels using an ecofeminist framework, which offers an insight not only in terms of gender studies but also in those of environmental issues, as well as any other kind of oppressive behavior towards the considered the *other*.

4.3 SUMMARY OF THE *XENOGENESIS* SERIES (LILITH'S BROOD)

The Xenogenesis trilogy was first published in three different volumes: *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989). In 2000 the three novels were put together in the same volume under the title of *Lilith's Brood.* All the page references to the novel included in this dissertation belong to the compiled edition.

Dawn

Dawn focuses on Lilith Iyapo, an African American woman who awakes alone in a strange room that she considers a prison. After some days, she is told that humans have almost destroyed the Earth in a nuclear war and that she is one of the few surviving humans rescued from the Earth by an extraterrestrial civilization called the Oankali. Once she gets used to the presence of the Oankali, one of the aliens tells her that they are a species of gene traders whose evolution—and survival—depends on mixing genes with other species. Lilith is also told that humans are one of the most interesting species they have ever encountered because they are genetically flawed, that is, humans are both intelligent and hierarchical, a mixture that has fatal consequences. When Lilith is allowed to leave her prison, which is actually a room within a structure similar to a tree, she discovers that she is on a spaceship—Chkahichdahk—that resembles a planet travelling around the Earth. The Oankali explain to her that eventually she will leave the spaceship to go back to the Earth, as soon as a part of the planet is rendered inhabitable once more. Lilith goes to live with an Oankali family and she develops a special relationship with one of the ooloi, Nikanj. She learns that the Oankali are divided into males, females and ooloi, and only the ooloi can carry out genetic engineering at a complex level thanks to a special tentacle that they grow when they reach adulthood. Moreover, the ooloi are the ones in charge of reproduction by mixing the genes of the parents. After some time with the Oankali, Lilith discovers that her body has been genetically modified to be faster and stronger. She is also told that as a preventive measure, all humans have been sterilized.

The Oankali propose a gene trade that they believe will be profitable for both species. Humans will have their flaw corrected and their physical conditions will be improved, but, as Lilith realizes, they will not be humans anymore. Lilith is chosen as the first one to participate in the trade by being mated with Nikanj. Although at first she is shocked by this idea, she then understands that Nikanj's trace has become so strong in her body that she is unable to be far

from it. When Nikanj goes through its second metamorphosis,[8] Lilith meets Nikanj's Oankali mates: Ahajas (female) and Dichaan (male). As the first Human to establish a hybrid family Lilith is the one to parent the first group of humans to go to Earth. For this purpose, the Oankali create a training area that imitates the conditions of an area around the Amazon river in their spaceship. After her training she is placed in a building where she has to awaken the humans she is to travel with to Earth. The problem is that many of the awakened humans do not believe the story of the aliens and as the days go by, conflicts start to take place. Because of her genetic modifications, many of the Humans look at her as if she were of a different species, and when the Oankali decide to show themselves, most of Humans refuse to make any contact with them.

The last part of *Dawn* focuses on humans' experience in the training area. Lilith teaches them all she has learnt about survival so that they would be able to live in the jungle when they return to Earth. Throughout the novel Lilith is confused with her role in this new society and although she tries to side with humans, she is attacked by them and her mate, Joseph, is killed. After a fight between humans and the Oankali in which the latter try to adopt a non-violent behavior, many of the aliens are injured. Ninkanj, who almost dies, finally survives thanks to Lilith's help. While the group of humans Lilith has parented goes back to the Earth, Lilith remains on the spaceship to train more humans. Finally, the novel closes with Nikanj telling Lilith that she is pregnant with Joseph's child—it had taken sperm from him and has used it with her. It also tells her that Ahajas (their female Oankali mate) is pregnant as well, that means that both children will have the same five parents: Ahajas, Dichaan, Nikanj, Lilith and Joseph.

Adulthood Rites

The second novel focuses on one of Lilith's construct[9] children, Akin. Akin is a special child since he is the first construct male born from a human mother, which is controversial since the Oankali are afraid that he will be more influenced by his human part and behave as some male humans: violently and ruled by hierarchical thought. The novel starts with Akin as a baby—at least in physical appearance because he soon learns to talk and to think and to express himself as an adult. One day, while he is with his mother, Lilith, they

[8] The Oankali are born without gender. Males, females and ooloi discover their gender once they go through metamorphosis, but the ooloi need a second metamorphosis in order to have their sensory organs completely developed.
[9] Construct child is the term Butler uses in order to refer to the hybrid children of human-Oankali families.

meet a resister,[10] Tino. Tino decides to go with Lilith to Lo, the trade village where Lilith lives together with other humans and some Oankali. He is surprised when he discovers that most construct children look human, at least before their metamorphosis—Akin himself looks completely human except for his tongue, which works as a sensory organ.

Tino tells them that he comes from Phoenix, a resister village where people have tried to recreate life the way it was before the war, but they live with bitterness because of the sterilization imposed by the Oankali. He compares the two different lifestyles and after some thinking, Tino finally decides to stay in Lo with Lilith and Nikanj. One day, a group of resisters attack Tino and kidnap Akin to sell him in Phoenix to get food, weapons or women. For some time, Akin lives with Tate and her husband Gabe Rinaldi—a couple who were in the first group of humans Lilith awakened. All the people in Phoenix love him because he looks like a normal human baby in a place where there are no children. One day Akin tells Tate about the future of the Earth as planned by the Oankali. He explains that after some years, the Oankali will leave the Earth as a dead rock because without the biochemical processes carried out by the Oankali, the planet will suffer again from the consequences of the nuclear war. Besides, the organic villages will in turn become spaceships to travel across the universe. Although Akin knows this is a discomforting thought for humans, he believes Tate should know the truth about what will happen to them if they go on rejecting the Oankali.

As Akin gains more contact with humans, he starts to show his concern for the situation of the resisters. He recalls that in the Oankali society there are three different types of individuals: those who engage in trade, called Dinso and Toaht; and those who remain "pure," without genetic mixing, which are called Akjai. Akin thinks it is unfair for humans not to have something like an Akjai group that could survive without the Oankali trade, despite being aware of the destructive nature of humans. This destructive nature is reinforced when Akin learns that the inhabitants from Phoenix visit the remains of an ancient city to pick up crystal, metal and plastic. He is unable to understand why humans before the war continued working with plastic even when they knew how dangerous it was for human health. Phoenix resisters are taking those materials because they want to start making weapons in order to defend themselves. Once Akin is rescued by the Oankali, more or less a year after his kidnapping, he tells Tate that he will keep to his promise of trying to find a solution for humans, to offer them another choice.

[10] Resister is the name given to all those humans who do not accept the Oankali trade and decide to settle on their own once on Earth.

The next part of the novel portrays a twenty-year old Akin. His same sex Oankali parent, Dichaan, is afraid because he thinks that Akin wanders too much time in resisters villages where he has sex with women. The reason for his wanderings is that he wants to know more about his human nature and that he is concerned for humans and their future. Since Dichaan is worried for Akin's behavior, he wants him to go to the Oankali spaceship, Chkahichdahk, where he could learn more of his Oankali part. From the beginning of his stay in the spaceship, Akin makes it clear that he wants to speak with the Oankali about humans' situation, but in order to propose an alternative for humans, he needs to learn as much genetics as possible.

In Chkahichdahk Akin establishes a special bond with an Akjai ooloi that teaches him about animals and helps him with his idea of a human Akjai. Akin tells him that Mars could be the perfect place for humans to start again, though the planet would have to be adapted for life and life conditions there would not be easy. This Akjai helps Akin by speaking for him to the Oankali, trying to reach a consensus as to what to do with the idea of the human Akjai. Finally, they accept Akin's idea of giving humans a second chance on Mars. The Oankali would heal them and help them with the adaptation of the planet, but apart from that, humans will be independent and they will be able to have children on their own. Shortly after his return he travels to Phoenix to visit his friends and tell them about the colony of Mars. When he gets to Phoenix he realizes the city has changed: he can only see drunkenness and weapons, a decadent place. Akin tells Tate that the idea of the Mars colony is going to be carried out so that they could live without the Oankali intromission. While he stays in Phoenix, Akin starts his metamorphosis transforming his appearance into a more Oankali-like one, which results in the burning of the house he is staying at. Tate and Gabe take Akin out of the city to a safe place, and although some others join them, many people are left behind in a burning Phoenix.

Imago

In this novel, Butler chooses a first person narrator who is also the protagonist of the story, Jodahs. Whereas Akin is Lilith and Joseph's child, Jodahs is Lilith and Tino's. As the title of the novel evokes,[11] this novel closes the evolutionary process of the human-Oankali hybrid species by telling the story of the first construct ooloi. Being a construct ooloi becomes a problem for Jodahs because the Oankali are not prepared to accept the challenge of a

[11] The word *imago* refers to the last stage of development of an insect.

potential genetic engineer with a human mother. If Jodahs is discovered he will be sent to the spaceship Chkahichdahk, so Jodahs's family decides to exile until it learns how to use its power without causing damage.

While the family (Lilith, Tino, Dichaan, Ahajas, Nikanj, Jodahs, Aaor, and four other siblings) goes through the jungle, they meet some resisters. Jodahs realizes then its ability to change its physical appearance just to please humans and that he can also help them regrow lost limbs. One of the problems of Jodahs becoming an ooloi is its Oankali born sibling, Aaor. In construct families, human born children and the Oankali born children tend to be born more or less at the same time. Usually, one of them becomes male and the other female just to become mates once they go through their metamorphosis. In the case of Jodahs, it was expected to be male and its sibling, Aaor, female. However, as Jodahs becomes an ooloi, when Aaor goes through the metamorphosis the family discovers it will also be an ooloi, thus becoming the first two ooloi siblings born to mothers of different species.

One day when Jodahs goes deep into the jungle looking for human mates, he finds a pair of them, male and female. Since the beginning, Jodahs realizes there is something strange about these humans. After Jodahs makes contact with them, it discovers that these humans suffer from a genetic disorder that makes them grow tumors. This means that they have never been treated by an ooloi, or at least not properly.[12] Little by little the couple start to trust Jodahs, and eventually they let it correct their disease and make their tumors disappear. These humans tell Jodahs that they are brother and sister, Jesusa and Tomás, and that they come from a village in the mountains where humans are fertile and breeding. Therefore, their genetic disorder is the product of incestuous relationships that started with a young woman who had not been sterilized on the Oankali spaceship. The siblings have escaped from the village to spend some time together because they know that once they are back in the village, they will be married to other humans in order to have children. Jodahs stays with them for several days until it realizes that its second metamorphosis is about to start, so it tells the couple that it needs to rest and to go back with its family. Jesusa and Tomás accept this and offer to take it with its family.

Once they find Jodahs's family, Jesusa and Tomás start to realize the great influence of Jodahs upon them, and how the three of them have become mutually dependent. Brother and sister tell Jodahs' family about the place they come from and that they have been told that the Oankali were devils. When Aaor hears about other young humans, it realizes that it could

[12] While humans are in suspended animation in the spaceship, the Oankali heal their bodies from genetic disorders or any other disease. In the case of Lilith, for instance, she had a cancer removed from her abdomen.

be the end of its suffering if it finds a couple to mate with. Finally, Jesusa and Tomás decide to help Aaor. This way, Aaor is able to find a couple, Javier and Paz, with whom it decides to stay. However, the two ooloi and their respective mates are discovered and imprisoned. While they stay in prison, more and more people of the village go to them to have their diseases healed. After some time, a shuttle arrives close to the village bringing Lilith's family as well as other families from the spaceship Chkahichdahk. After some conversations, Jodahs and Aaor are allowed to keep their human mates, but they will have to wait for their Oankali mates. The village in the mountains becomes their home and Jodahs is asked to plant a trade village there, a village that many years later will become a spaceship in order to travel through the universe, just as Chkahichdahk.

4.4 APPROACHES TO *LILITH'S BROOD*

Although *Kindred* is perhaps Butler's most well known book, her *Xenogenesis* series has also been the object of literary analysis from different perspectives. Butler's SF is characterized by the multiple voices she offers concerning a variety of social issues, so an ecofeminist analysis of the *Xenogenesis* series will lead to interesting conclusions regarding the treatment of the *other*. In this sense, Christa Grewe-Volpp's article "Octavia Butler and the Nature/Culture Divide: An Ecofeminist Approach to the *Xenogenesis* Trilogy," which works as a point of departure for part of this dissertation, offers a brief analysis of the trilogy from an ecofeminist perspective with special focus on the relationship between the alien species, the Oankali, and the environment. She also deals to some extent with ideas of difference, purity and hybridity. This article is important because it points to the huge possibilities Butler's trilogy offers for a literary analysis using an ecofeminist framework. Another important critical work regarding the *Xenogenesis* trilogy is Patricia Melzer's book *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*. In this work Melzer studies several SF works focusing on the representation of gender and on the possibilities that this genre offers for feminist though. Among the chapters of the book, she devotes several of them to the study of the *Xenogenesis* series, exploring gender as well as the representation of aliens in relation to the concept of the *other*.

Apart from the works above mentioned, whose main focus is on the representation of the alien, the *Xenogenesis* series has been approached from several perspectives. In the next few pages I will refer to most of the critical work produced on the novels, classified according to topic. This exploration of the possible analyses of the trilogy is significant because it illustrates the complexity of Butler's trilogy.

4.4.1 Xenophobia and Racism

Xenophobia plays an important role in this trilogy in two different ways. First, we find humans' feelings of xenophobia towards the alien Oankali, the *other*, whose appearance inspire fear in humans because of the tentacles that cover their bodies. Second, humans develop xenophobic/racist attitudes to humans belonging to certain ethnic groups. For example, some of the humans that become resisters and refuse to mix with the Oankali establish racist villages where non-white people cannot go. This is what happens in the

second novel *Adulthood Rites* when Akin, who is half Asian and half African-American, tries to enter a resister village. Akin is rejected not because he is a construct or hybrid child but because of the skin color: "He had been driven out of, of all things, a village of English-speaking people because he was browner than the villagers were. He did not understand this, and he had not dared to ask anyone in Lo" (434). Racism in the *Xenogenesis* series presents an interesting aspect as it is the Northern hemisphere the one that has suffered most of the consequences of the nuclear war. Then, the majority of the survivors rescued by the Oankali were from the Southern hemisphere and of Asian, African, or Hispanic origin – though some "white" humans were rescued also. This is quite significant if we take into account that ethnic groups that had been traditionally labeled as minorities in white-dominant countries become the majority in this trilogy in which humanity itself becomes a minority in face of the aliens.

The issue of race is present throughout Butler's works, especially in her novel *Kindred*, which focuses on slavery by using the SF devise of time travel. However, Butler found it difficult at first to publish her works because some editors thought that black characters—with fully-developed personalities—should not be included in SF because they "would distract the reader from the story" (Melzer 44). This objection is related to the idea that SF should focus on object instead of on subject: that is, SF is more concerned with plots rather than with character development. However, Butler is representative of those SF writers able to focus both on object and subject. Butler is able to recognize the importance of SF for social criticism concerning gender and race while using typical SF images and plots. An example of this is how she portrays characters that belong to ethnic minorities as a kind of vindication for difference as well as a protest against the apparent invisibility of this type of characters in popular genres such as SF and fantasy (Melzer 44).

Butler's *Xenogenesis* series provides examples of racism and xenophobia—both among humans and between humans and the Oankali—that can be interesting from an ecofeminist point of view in order to study oppressive attitudes based on the fear of difference or otherness. Burton Raffel's article "Genre to the Rear, Race and Gender to the Fore: The Novels of Octavia Butler" analyzes issues of gender and race in several of Butler's novels, with special focus on the *Xenogenesis* and the *Patternist* series. Another article with a similar approach is that of Elyce Rae Helford, entitled "'Would You Really Rather Die than Bear My Young?': The Construction of Gender, Race, and Species in Octavia E. Butler's 'Bloodchild'." This article briefly discusses the *Xenogenesis* series, but its main concern is Butler's award winning short story "Bloodchild" (1984), a story that also portrays the relationship between humans and aliens.

The basic conflict of Butler's novels dealing with aliens is that of hybridity between two species, and how the idea of humanity is redefined throughout the novel, just as in Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*. Hybridity, and its correspondence with the concept of the cyborg as defined by Donna Haraway, is one of the aspects of Butler's novels that critics have been more interested in. Moreover, Donna Haraway in her book *Simians, Cyborg and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* analyzes briefly some aspects of Butler's *Xenogenesis* series concerning her definition of the cyborg. Lilith, the protagonist of *Dawn*, the first novel of the *Xenogenesis* series, is made responsible for the salvation of humanity, a salvation that consists of accepting otherness and hybridity as the next step in human evolution. Because this is such an important aspect in the novel, there are several articles written about it, for example, Jae H. Roe's "Becoming Other Than Ourselves: Difference and Hybridity in Species and the *Xenogenesis Trilogy"* or Cathy Peppers' article entitled "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identites in Butler's *Xenogenesis.*" Other authors who have also approached hybridity in the novel using the cyborg theory of Donna Haraway are Jeboon Yu with "The Representation of Inappropriate/d Others: The Epistemology of Donna Haraway's Cyborg Feminism and Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis Series*" or Rebecca J. Holden in "The High Costs of Cyborg Survival: Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis Trilogy."*

Another interesting article dealing with issues of racism and hybridity is Frances Bonner's "Difference and Desire, Slavery and Seduction: Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis.*" In this article Bonner focuses her attention both on the *Xenogenesis* trilogy as in the *Patternist* series. As we can deduce from the title, Bonner is interested in the idea of difference, especially in terms of race. She comments on racial concerns in SF, highlighting the fact that Butler is one of the few African American SF writers, and the most well known African American woman in doing so. Comparing the *Patternist* series and the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Bonner explores the portrayal of power and the hierarchies that Butler presents in her works. She relates the experience of Butler's characters with slavery, focusing on how master and slave establish a strange relationship based on both desire and repulsion.

4.4.2 Feminism

As I have already commented when I mentioned Patricia Melzer's book *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*, the *Xenogenesis* series is an interesting work regarding feminism. In these novels Butler plays with gender roles and gender relations

by incorporating alien individuals divided in male, female and ooloi: that is, three different sexes. Another article concerning gender roles and Butler's works in general is Sharon DeGraw's "'The More Things Change, the More They Remain the Same': Gender and Sexuality in Octavia Butler's Oeuvre." This article focuses on Butler's series (*Patternmaster*, *Xenogenesis*, and *Parable*) and how their female protagonists finally accept traditional roles—what DeGraw calls "gender retrogression"—in spite of being characters who apparently challenge power hierarchies, and especially gender. Following with the issue of gender, Amanda Boulter has also used feminist theory to approach the works of SF women writers—including Octavia Butler—in her dissertation *Speculative Feminisms: The Significance of Feminist Theory in the Science Fiction of Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, JR., and Octavia Butler.*

Feminism plays an important role in the first part of the trilogy, *Dawn*, since its protagonist and narrator is an African American woman called Lilith Iyapo. This first book focuses on her thoughts, her feelings, her reactions and how her choices become relevant for the future of humanity. Lilith challenges the stereotypical conception that women in SF can only be secondary characters. Butler portrays Lilith as a strong woman—both physically and psychologically—who has to face her fears and become the savior of humanity. Butler's choice of the name Lilith for the protagonist of *Dawn* is a rather interesting one since Lilith is believed to have been the first wife that God gave Adam.[13]

Other critics have not only focused their research on Lilith as a SF heroine, but also in the fact that she is an African American woman. Throughout Butler's works we can find several examples of heroines that challenge "the fictional norm of hero by being Black as well as female and sexually autonomous" (Lefanu, *Chinks* 24). Important black heroines in Butler's work apart from Lilith are, for example, Dana in *Kindred*, Alana in *Survivor*, Mary in *Mind of My Mind* or Anyanwu in some parts of the *Patternist* series. In the *Parable* series we also find another African American heroine Lauren Olamina, who, despite her problem of hyper-empathy, struggles to establish her own community in a dystopic world. Ruth Salvaggio's "Octavia Butler and the Black Science-Fiction Heroine"—written before the first book of the *Xenogenesis* series was published—analyzed Butler's potential in the use of black heroines, focusing her analysis in the *Patternist* series. Something similar is what Thelma J. Shinn analyzes in her article "The Wise Witches: Black Women Mentors in the Fiction of Octavia Butler," also written before the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. More recently, Éva Federmayer

[13] This idea will be further developed in section 5.4.

has also written about the black heroine, but in this case the focus is on the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, in her article "Octavia Butler's Maternal Cyborgs: The Black Female World of the Xenogenesis Trilogy."

4.4.3 Environmental Degradation, Cancer and Genetic Engineering

Other approaches to the novel are those related not to the characters or their relations but to some issues that, directly or indirectly, Butler exposes. Environmental degradation plays an important role in this series, as a consequence of human's hierarchical thought and the nuclear war that resulted from it. With the nuclear war that almost destroys the Earth, humans do not only annihilate the vast majority of their own species, but they also kill animal species and plants that in the novel are described as lost forever. Besides, the whole planet Earth itself is altered by the nuclear weapons, and the resulting radiation produces changes in the natural cycles of the planet making it uninhabitable for centuries.

Apart from the nuclear war, there is another aspect related to environmental degradation that is important in the novel and that is the issue of cancer. For humans, cancer means illness, suffering and, most of the times, death; however, for the Oankali and their ability of interacting with living organisms, cancer means the possibility for making lost limbs grow and for changing physical appearance. Since they are genetic engineers by nature, the Oankali are able to make cancer reabsorb itself and use cell metastasis to regenerate limbs. This way, one of the most feared diseases of our time has a positive potential in the eyes of the Oankali. The issue of cancer and its relation with environmental degradation is explored to some extent in *Adulthood Rites*, the second part of the series, when a construct child is unable to understand how Humans could use poisonous materials and products—such as some types of plastic—after knowing abour their carcinogenic nature.

The Oankali are expert genetic engineers whose anatomical peculiarities enable them to manipulate living organisms and their cells. In these novels, Butler uses the Oankali to explore the consequences of genetic manipulation and the ethical conflicts that may derive from it, but she does not offer her own judgment concerning these issues, she just presents the situation for the reader to consider. Although Butler uses an alien civilization, her novels actually mirror real situations that have taken place in our history, while giving some kind of warning as to the possible consequences of genetic manipulation without the establishment of proper laws.

This issue of genetic manipulation and its moral considerations has been studied by several critics. For example, Rachel Stein in her article "Gene Trading and Organ Theft" analyzes how the Oankali manipulate everything that surrounds them, including human beings, without taking into account their feelings and the ethics of their practices from a human point of view. Other authors have written about the consequences of the hybridity between humans and aliens by creating a new species with the best of the other two species. This is the main point of articles such as Amanda Boulter's "Polymorphous Futures: Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis Trilogy"* and Naomi Jacobs' "Posthuman Bodies and Agency in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*."

4.5 BIOGRAPHY OF JOAN SLONCZEWSKI

When Graham Fowell asked Joan Slonczewski to summarize herself in the form of a title of a paper in the journal *Nature* she answered "Polish–Italian cross generates hybrid microbial scientist with aberrant phenotype" (501). Slonczewski was born in 1956 in Katonah (NY) and grew up in a wooded area of Wetchester County. Because of this, her interest in nature started at a young age. She was still a child when she made contact with science, since her father was a theoretical physicist at IBM, what allowed her to play with computers much earlier than other children (Heideman n.p.). In 1977 she obtained a B.A. in biology from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, and it was precisely during those years as an undergraduate student when she made contact with the Society of Friends (Quakers), religion of which she became a member later (Heideman n.p.).

In 1982 she obtained her PhD at the department of Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry of the University of Yale. Her dissertation was entitled *Regulation and Sensing of Bacterial pH in Escherichia coli,* and her supervisor, Robert M. Macnab, whom she acknowledges as the most important mentor in her career because he was the one who taught her "what the 'p' means in pH, and how to write literate science papers" (Fowell 501). Since 2000 Slonczewski, who has specialized in bacteriology and genetics, is a professor of the Department of Biology at Kenyon College in Gambier (Ohio), where she lives with her husband and her two sons (Heideman n.p.).

For most of her life, Joan Slonczewski has combined her career in biology with her career as a well-known SF writer. In fact, her novels include the most advanced scientific discoveries in biology, with special interest in microbiology. In an interview for *Nature*, Slonczewski reflects on the relationship between scientific discoveries and SF and concludes that actually microbiology is "getting stranger than anything in science fiction" (Fowell 501). Apart from biology from a scientific perspective, Slonczewski is much concerned with the biologist's task of protecting and salvaging whatever they can. In her interview with Graham Fowell, Slonczewski recognized that if she had not become a biologist, she would have probably become "a lawyer for the Sierra Club environmental action group" (Fowell 501).

Among the influences in her two careers, and apart from her mentor at Yale, we can find the American biologist Lynn Margulis, a supporter of the theory of symbiogenesis and of Lovelock's hypothesis of Gaia (Fowell 501). In her career as a SF writer, Slonczewski acknowledges several influences. She always enjoyed reading SF but Ursula K. Le Guin was

part of her inspiration for writing (Schellenberg and Switzer n.p.; Heideman n.p.). In terms of technique, style and development she states that science fiction writers Robert Heinlein and Frank Herbert are her main influences. In particular, Slonczewski admires Herbert for his ability to attract readers' attention so much and for his portrayal of all the different characters and cultures that interact in his most well-known novel, *Dune* (Schellenberg and Switzer n.p.; Heideman n.p.).

4.6 SLONCZEWSKI'S SCIENCE FICTION

Joan Slonczewski published her first novel when she was only 24 years old and two years before she finished her dissertation (Lindow 282). The novel was entitled *Still Forms on Foxfield* (1980) and it tells the story of a group of humans who escape from the Earth because a nuclear war is about to take place. These humans belong to the Society of Friends or Quakers—as Slonczewski herself—and establish a sort of colony on Foxfield, a planet inhabited by a species called the Commensals. Although at first humans consider the native people as hostile, they later realize that the Commensals made it possible for humans to survive in Foxfield thanks to their chemical talents. This first novel portrays one of the issues that would be later present in most of her works, the question of achieving a balance between technology and the environment while respecting the native inhabitants of the planet. However, this peaceful situation is challenged when the Earth contacts the colony to reopen communications, thus provoking a crisis in Foxfield, since its inhabitants did not want to be found. One of the most interesting aspects of this novel is how convincingly the author describes the interaction beteen the native aliens and human colonists. Although Slonczewski's first novel was both original and favorably reviewed, the novel did not enjoy a great success, and some years passed before Slonczewski published her next book (D'Ammassa 344).

Slonczewski's first novel already shows most of the themes that are going to appear in all her novels. Since she grew up during the nuclear arms race, and because she was much affected by it (Heideman n.p.), the nuclear war is an important element in her first novel.[14] The other two themes that are recurrent in her literary work are related to "both her scientific and spiritual training" (Heideman n.p.). As a person interested in science from an early age, that discipline—especially biology and chemistry—plays an important role in her work in the form of symbiotic relationships between species or of genetic engineering. Concerning religion, Slonczewski is a known member of the Society of Friends (Quakers) and Quakerism as such, or disguised as an alien species' set of values, is also present throughout her work.

Her second novel, and the most well-known one, is *A Door into Ocean* (1986). In 1987 this novel received the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for Best Science Fiction Novel, in spite of having been rejected by two publishing houses before the book came out.

[14] This is an interesting aspect since Octavia Butler herself also used the theme of nuclear war in her trilogy *Lilith's Brood*.

Slonczewski has admitted that she wrote this novel as a kind of response to Frank Herbert's *Dune* and to Ursula Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* ("Study Guide" n.p.). Although she admires the work of Herbert in *Dune*, she comments that the societies that appear in the novel are all dominated by males and by violence. The author explains that for these reasons she tried to oppose *Dune* by creating a world covered with water and inhabited by a female civilization that faces war through non-violent resistance ("Study Guide" n.p.). In the case of *The Word for World is Forest*, Slonczewski was somehow disappointed because although the characters are pacifist at the beginning, they also make use of violence losing their humanity as a result. For her novel Slonczewski did not want characters that had to renounce to their humanity to achieve their goals, and that is what she does in *A Door into Ocean*, where Sharers resist an invasion pacifically in spite of the loss of lives.

A Door into Ocean portrays the civilization of the planet Shora, a society of women—Sharers—who are expert genetic engineers who live in harmony and symbiosis with the ecosystem that surrounds them, a moon covered by water. Slonczewski focuses on how Sharers respond to an invasion by another civilization who wants to learn about their genetic knowledge. In this novel, Sharers are an example of what nonviolent resistance is by trying to understand why they are attacked instead of using genetic engineering to counterattack the invaders. Another interesting aspect is how Slonczewski uses multiple viewpoints in order to create contrasts and to help readers understand the reactions and feelings of the two civilizations portrayed (Heideman n.p.).[15] This novel became very popular thanks to its feminist themes and to Slonczewski's ability to portray alternative societies. The setting of this novel will be also used in the rest of the novels of the Elysium cycle, of which this novel is the first one.

Joan Slonczewski's third novel is entitled *The Wall Around Eden* and it was published in 1990. As in her first novel, the author presents here the issue of nuclear weapons by portraying a post-apocalyptic Earth some years after a nuclear war. Apart from the surviving humans, an alien species has arrived to the planet and created some sort of structure to control the radiation that otherwise would kill humans. However, some humans do not feel comfortable with the alien species and see them more as enemies than as allies. The survivors have to live with limited resources while trying to understand the reason why the insect-like aliens assist them and supervise the planet (Lindow 283). Once more Slonczewski deals with the interaction of two different civilizations which appear opposed one to the other. Besides,

[15] This novel will be summarized and analyzed in detail later on in this dissertation.

as in her other novels, Quakerism is also part of the story since many of the human communities of the book profess this religion.

Daughter of Elysium (1993), Slonczewski's fourth novel and part of the Elysium cycle, is the sequel to *A Door into Ocean.* This novel takes the reader 1000 years after the events of *A Door into Ocean,* and focuses on how different civilizations coexist in Shora. One of these civilizations seems to have discovered the secret of immortality although in turn they cannot breed. Another social group is represented by the robots that work for humans, thus questioning power-relations and slavery. The last group of inhabitants of Shora are Sharers, some of them descendants from the protagonists of *A Door into Ocean.* Slonczewski depicts in a complete and detailed way the different debates that appear among these civilizations, especially those related to issues such as terraforming, population control or machine sentience. Besides, and as Sandra Lindow points out, one of the important aspects of this novel—a motif that is also present in most of Slonczewski's novels—is "children's involvement in solving major problems" (283).

In 1998, Joan Slonczewski published *The Children Star* in book form, although in that same year, the novel was also published in four parts in the magazine *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*. The story of this fifth novel is set in the planet Prokaryon, a planet that belongs to the universe she created in *A Door into Ocean*. Prokaryon is described as an uninhabitable place except for those who accept to go through a series of genetic modifications in order to adapt their bodies to the peculiarities of the planet, especially in terms of food. Since these modifications are more expensive the older a person is, the ideal inhabitants for establishing a colony in this planet are children. For this reason, a religious community founds a colony of orphans in the planet under the protection of both sentient robots and humans. Little by little the reader discovers that Prokaryon's ecosystem is structured in certain fixed patterns that make the characters think that the planet is not as abandoned as it appeared at first sight.

Joan Slonczewski's next novel came out in 2000. *Brain Plague*, also set in the universe of the two previous novels, tells the story of a young artist, Chrysoberyl, who accepts participating in an experiment that will improve her mind. Through the experiment, Chrysoberyl becomes hostess to certain microscopic creatures that had already appeared in *The Children Star*. In this novel, the clash of civilizations takes place within human bodies, since the microscopic but intelligent creatures inhabiting people's brains want to be recognized as a society and to have their rights taken into account (Lindow 283). However, in some cases these microbes have been able to take control of the human mind becoming a plague that spreads through the universe.

Joan Slonczewski's last novel, *The Highest Frontier*, was published in 2011. In this novel she presents the struggle of humans against an extraterrestrial organism called ultraphyte. Politics, religion and science also play an important role in the novel, three different issues present in most Slonczewski's novels. Apart from these novels, she has also written a short story called "Microbe" (1995), also set in the Elysium universe. In spite of the relatively small number of novels written by Slonczewski, given her job as a full time professor at university, she is a well-known SF writer whose quality and importance has been recognized in the form of awards. Besides, and because of her background as a biologist and as a Quaker, her works offer a detailed description of humanity by exploring the coexistence of civilizations regarding scientific, religious and ethical issues.

4.7 SUMMARY OF *A DOOR INTO OCEAN*

The novel *A Door into Ocean* tells the story of the clash between two opposing civilizations: Valedon and Sharers, the latter being all women. The novel opens with two Sharers, Merwen and Usha, arriving at a Valan city in order to study whether Valans can be considered human enough so that the trade with them can continue. During their visit they meet Spinel, a Valan boy that decides to travel with the couple to Shora as an apprentice of Sharers' ways. In their journey back to Shora, Merwen, Usha and Spinel meet Berenice/Nisi, a wealthy Valan woman whose parents are traders on Shora, and who has spent long periods of her life living among Sharers. When Spinel arrives at Shora he is surprised to find that Sharers live on rafts on the water surface. Merwen and Usha's raft is called Raia-el and there they live with their daughters. Their eldest daughter, Lystra does not like Spinel at the beginning and considers him an inferior because of his Valan origin. When little by little Spinel gets used to behaving like Sharers, spending longer periods of time swimming, Lystra ends up considering him an equal and they fall in love.

Regarding the question of Valans' humanness, Merwen and Usha—as a result of their experience with Spinel and Nisi—explain that they may be considered humans, and not "sick children" as some Sharers refer to them because of their violent and oppressive attitudes. However, most Sharers decide to boycott traders, thus attracting the attention of Valedon. Valans also become interested in Shora because Nisi tells hem about their vast scientific knowledge, so they decide to send an envoy in order to see if Sharers represent any danger. With the arrival of the envoy Merwen becomes a spokesperson for the Sharers, and they finally agree on allowing some Valan scientists to access Sharers' scientific facilities to learn from them. After the visit of the envoy and a misunderstanding between Lystra and Spinel, both Nisi and Spinel go back to Valedon.

Once in Valedon, Nisi learns that Valans' plan consists of invading Shora and that the person in charge of the invasion is her fiancé Raelgar. Because of this, she fakes her death and travels to Shora in disguise. Once she arrives at Shora, she goes through the final process to become a full Sharer, so she learns whitetrance, a concentration-protection technique in which the Sharer's mind goes empty and the skin becomes white.

Raelgar believes Nisi is dead and goes to Shora convinced of the success of his mission. His first task is to control "hazardous activities" and Usha shows him her laboratory in the raft. Troops start to look for laboratories in an aggressive way and Sharers greet them in

whitetrance as a kind of protest. But the troops also take prisoners and some of them end up dying after staying in whitetrance through the interrogation processes. The reaction of Sharers is to sit in front of Valan headquarters waiting for the imprisoned Sharers to be freed, and opposing Valans in non-violent ways. Frustrated by Sharers' pacific behavior Raelgar finally orders the destruction of the laboratories in the rafts.

During this time, Spinel stays in his hometown on Valedon, which is controlled by guards. Because of his learning among the Sharers, he becomes some kind of spiritual figure that gives advice. But when he learns about the Valan invasion of Shora, he decides to go back in order to help. Raelgar tries to use Spinel to make Merwen surrender. Failing, he decides to take all the children to the headquarters, where Spinel helps taking care of them until he escapes swimming. Despite the violent behavior of Valans, Sharers decide to continue opposing them in peace and not by using plagues. This situation makes Raelgar understand that even his second-in-command's methods, which consist of torture, are useless against Sharers. Finally, he frees all the imprisoned Sharers including the children.

But when the situation seems to be calm, Realgar finds out that his supposedly dead lover is hidden in Shora, so he asks Merwen to tell Nisi to surrender. Nisi decides to commit suicide while blowing up part of the headquarters, so that no more Sharers' lives are at risk. The explosion does not kill her and some soldiers catch her while trying to escape. Even though she tells Raelgar only she was involved in the explosion, he takes revenge by burning prominent Sharers one by one. It is then when Merwen decides to speak again with Valans, and Raelgar interprets this as a small victory.

Merwen and others are taken as prisoners and the other Sharers hold a gathering and some of them agree to die in front of the soldiers to "share" the experience. One of the scientists explains to Realgar that the invasion of Shora may have been designed to force Sharers to use their weapons in order to see their real power, and although Realgar considers the scientist a traitor, he reflects on the scientist's words. Raelgar's anger grows as many Sharers sacrifice their lives, a situation that worsens when the Valan headquarters end up destroyed in the hands of the seaswallowers—a native animal species of Shora—and Sharers rescue Valans from the sea. Finally, when his superiors learn of all the problems in Shora, Realgar resigns and leaves the planet. The final decision is that all Valans have to leave Shora and leave it to the Sharers. At this point, Spinel doubts what to do, but finally he decides to stay in Shora and share his life with Lystra and the Sharers.

4.8 APPROACHES TO *A DOOR INTO OCEAN*

Although *A Door into Ocean* is a well-known SF novel that received the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for Best Science Fiction Novel in 1987, the amount of critical work produced on this novel is not as vast as that on Butler's *Xenogenesis.* However, there are several articles and book chapters that deal separately with some of the topics that appear in this novel, thus hinting at the complexity of the novel plot. As in the case of *Lilith's Brood*, there has been some critical work on *A Door into Ocean* using an ecofeminist approach, and these works will be used as a starting point, but the novel still has much to offer to ecofeminist literary criticism.

In first place I would like to point out Eric Otto's work on *A Door into Ocean*. In his dissertation *Science Fiction and the Ecological Conscience* he analyzes how many SF works written in the last decades express an ecological conscience in different ways. In his comparative analysis, he focuses on Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy.* Otto uses an ecocritical perspective to study how these novels portray ecological issues, and in the case of Slonczewski's novel, he comments that Slonczewski portrays ecofeminist ideas that may result too essentialist. In his recently published book *Green Speculations*, Otto devotes the third chapter—entitled "Ecofeminist Theories of Liberation"—to the study of Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, Le Guin's *Always Coming Home,* and Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean.* In this case, he focuses on how ecofeminist ideals appear represented in these novels.

Another article that explores *A Door into Ocean* from an ecofeminist perspective is Edrie Sobstyl's "All the Sisters of Shora: An Anarcha/Ecofeminist Reading of Slonczewski´s *A Door Into Ocean*." Sobstyl is especially interested in how the novel reconciles social ecology and ecofeminism. For her analysis, she takes into account Murray Bookchin's ideas on social ecology and she focuses on what ecofeminism can offer to social ecology and the other way around. She defends the idea that, although social ecologists and ecofeminists have criticized each other for having different points of view, both movements can enrich each other if they focus on their common interest, that is, the environment.

One final author approaching the novel from a somewhat ecofeminist perspective is Susan Stratton. In her article "Intersubjectivity and Difference in Feminist Ecotopias," Stratton is concerned with ecocriticism and how this new school is being slowly accepted by

literary criticism in general. Her article of 2001 expresses the hope that ecofeminist critique will soon become a new perspective in literary criticism. In this article she also analyzes some feminist utopias that have been described as ecotopias because of the importance of the natural world, including in her analysis Slonczewski's novel.

These three authors have somehow laid the foundations for an ecofeminist analysis of *A Door into Ocean* by approaching certain particular aspects of the novel and their relevance for ecofeminism. But apart from these works there are several other articles which have analyzed *A Door into Ocean* focusing on issues that may be directly or indirectly related to an ecofeminist analysis of the novel and that will be discussed for this reason.

4.8.1 Ecology

One of the most striking features of the Sharers of *A Door into Ocean* is their relationship with the natural world that surrounds them. In general, ecosystems play an important role in all Slonczewski's novels, probably as a result of her interest in nature and in science and biology since childhood. In their interview with Joan Slonczeswi, James Schellenberg and David Switzer discuss with the author the importance of the natural world in her works, especially in those of the Elysium cycle. The novels of this cycle, all set in the universe to which the ocean moon Shora belongs, explore the consequences of environmental degradation and of terraforming. The process of terraforming a planet implies the loss of biodiversity, and particularly of the native species of a habitat, since new plants and animals are introduced to make humans' life easier at the expense of the biological richness. By dealing with these issues, Slonczewski wants her readers to understand the future consequences of our behavior towards the natural world, thus inviting us to realize "the long-term, creeping dangers to our world, particularly the tragic loss of so many of our living ecosystems" (Schellenberg and Switzer n.p.). In her novel *The Wall around Eden*, Slonczewski also states her concerns for humans' behavior towards the planet by portraying the aftermath of a nuclear war. As a biologist she understands that each species has its own life span, but she recognizes that she expected that human beings—being intelligent creatures—would survive more, instead of "destroying ourselves" (Schellenberg and Switzer n.p.).

4.8.2 Religion

Just as biology and the natural world play an important role in the works of Joan Slonczewski, her narrative has also been much influenced by her religious concerns. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of her novels is precisely this combination of scientific and religious themes and how the interaction of these two issues can enrich each other or interact in interesting ways (Schellenberg and Switzer n.p.; Heideman n.p.). When Slonczewski was an undergraduate student, she became familiar with Quakerism and since then, this religion has been an important element both in her personal life and in her writing. In her interview with Eric Heideman, the author declared that Quakerism gave her "a healthier world view, and some sort of hopeful alternatives for the future" that enabled her to write more optimistically about the future (Heideman n.p.).

Quakerism appears in her novels in different ways. For example, in *Still Forms from Foxfield,* the group of humans who escape from the Earth belongs to this religious group. This religion also appears in a more subtle way in the novel *A Door into Ocean.* In this novel, the Sharers are not Quakers but the portrayal of their lifestyle and of their values regarding others as well as the environment mirrors some of the attitudes that Quakerism represents. Several authors have pointed out the importance of this religion in this novel, as well as in other examples of her writing. For example, Edward F. Higgins's article "Quaker Ethos as Science Praxis in Joan L. Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*" analyzes how Sharers portray Quaker practices and ideas in the way they live and in their attitude towards others. Another article analyzing religious beliefs in Slonczewski's writing is Virginia Wolf's "'The Kin-Dom of God' in Joan Slonczewski's Novels," which analyzes how the author includes in her writing feminist theological ideas based on harmony and on the interconnections of all forms of life. Wolf pays especial attention to the idea of consensus and to the interdependence of all living creatures that Slonczewski portrays in *A Door into Ocean.*

4.8.3 Gender

A Door into Ocean, because it portrays a female utopian world, is especially interesting if we focus on the representation of gender. For this reason, we can find several critical works that explore how gender is understood in the novel. For example, in her article "Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*: Why Feminist Utopians Might Like Science Fiction"

Diane Koaster explores the opposition between Valans and Sharers in terms of gender. In her analysis, she describes the Sharers of Shora as a feminist utopia whereas Valedon and what it represents is referred to in dystopic terms. Koaster pays special attention to the non-violent attitude of Sharers and to their belief in the interconnectedness of all form of life, a belief that shapes their attitude towards other creatures in terms of awareness and respect. The portrayal of Shora as a feminist utopia is also dealt with in Susan Stone-Blackburn's article "Single-Sexed Utopias and Our Two-Sexed Reality." In this work, the author does not only focus on *A Door into Ocean* but also on other two feminist SF novels in which we can find feminist utopias: Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground.* One of the main claims that Stone-Blackburn makes in this article is that single-sexed utopias may work as metaphor for what a society without gender categories would be, that is, a society without patriarchy and without the oppressive conceptual framework patriarchy usually entails.

Another comparative analysis can be found in Peter's Fitting's "Reconsiderations of the Separatist Paradigm in Recent Feminist Science Fiction." In this article, Fitting explores the female utopia of Shora in *A Door into Ocean* as well as those we can find in Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* and in Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*. In this article, the main focus is on highlighting the differences between the utopias just mentioned and those written in the 1970s, in which violence played an important role. Finally, I would like to mention another article on Joan Slonczewski's treatment of gender issues. Barbara Summerhawk's "He, She or It: The Cyborg De-Constructs Gender in Post Modern Science Fiction" is interesting because it incorporates the cyborg theory postulated by Donna Haraway in her book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. This article does not explore *A Door into Ocean* but it focuses on its sequel *Daughter of Elyseum,* in which Sharers appear once more as an important group; and also on Marge Piercy's *He, She or It.*

V. ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

Before starting the comparative analysis of Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* series or *Lilith's Brood* (*LB)* and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (*ADIO*),[16] I would like to point out the reason why I chose these two novels. The two authors can be described as contemporaries although Butler was almost ten years older than Slonczewski, and both are considered among the most important SF women writers of the last decades. In particular, the two novels analyzed in this dissertation were written in the same historical moment, the late 1980s. Butler's trilogy was published between 1987 and 1989, and Slonczewski's novel came out in 1986. This promixity in the publication dates of both novels explains the number of similarities between both novels, especially regarding the issue of nuclear weapons. As a response to the militaristic race of the last years of the Cold War, both authors decided to question the implications of war and its consequences for both human and non-human species.

However, the main reason for the choice of these two novels is that they both portray the opposition between aliens and humans in such a way that the encounter with otherness is approached from an always changing perspective. For this reason, the first section of this analysis will focus on how the narrative voices of both novels reflect this shifting perspective of otherness and the blurred boundary between self and *other*. After that, and in order to carry out the comparative thematic analysis of these two novels, each topic will initially be approached separately and focusing on one novel at a time before including a comparative study of different themes related with the objectives set in the introduction of this dissertation. Firstly, the analysis will focus on the portrayal of the environment in both novels, with special interest in how the different civilizations—alien and human—interact with the natural world around them. Secondly, the focus will be on science and how the two societies interpret the idea of scientific research. In this section, the main concern will be genetic engineering, and how both authors deal with its advantages and disadvantages. The third theme will be that of gender and how the alien societies conceive gender in a different way than humans. At this point we will see how both Butler and Slonczweski deconstruct gender categories to create societies in which gender cannot be understood as a hierarchy or as a way of justifying oppression. The fourth section of this analysis will be devoted to the image of the alien in

[16] From now on, all the references to the novels will be made using the short forms of *LB* for *Lilith's Brood* and *ADIO* for *A Door into Ocean*.

both novels and how it is opposed to humans. In order to do so, several aspects of the two societies, both positive and negative, will be considered. Finally, the alien and human societies portrayed in these literary works will be analyzed from an ecofeminist perspective following the ideas of Val Plumwood and Karen Warren to see if they respond to the idea of a "healthy society" based on a "partnership ethics."

5.1 NARRATIVE VOICES

As we will see later in section 5.5, both Octavia Butler's *LB* and Joan Slonczewski's *ADIO* question the boundary between human and alien, between self and the *other*. These novels portray both the encounter with difference and the question of humanness while exploring the portrayal of otherness from different points of view. In the analysis of these two novels we can appreciate how the authors use the character of the alien as a metaphor for alterity, using the clash between two opposing civilizations to explore human attitudes towards the *other*. In order to do so, both authors experiment with narrative voices that continually shift the focalization, a strategy often present in SF texts. As Jane Donawerth posits, many women writers of SF decide to incorporate in their works "multiple voices that challenge the power of a single (traditionally in Science Fiction, male) point of view" (131). This multiplicity of narrators enriches the text because it gives the reader a complex and complete vision of the story by including voices that in previous SF texts were left unheard. For feminist writers this strategy is especially interesting because the presence of several voices instead of a single one makes the storytelling "less hierarchical" and so it is more fragmented and distributed (Donawerth 131).

As mentioned before, Octavia Butler is one of these women writers of SF that use several narrators, maybe as a way of destabilizing gender (Donawerth 146). But in the case of Octavia Butler, the multiplicity of voices does not only defy gender but also race, since the three narrative voices of *LB* do not only belong to three separate genders but also to different races and even species. The first two parts of *LB* are examples of what is referred to in narratology as *internal focalization*, that is, we perceive the story from the point of view of the protagonist but we also have access to his/her feelings and thoughts (Fludernik 153). In the first part, *Dawn*, the third-person narrator is focused on the protagonist Lilith Iyapo and what happens to her, including her feelings and her fears. As humans, readers find it easy to identify with her, since at first she is the only human protagonist in contrast with a whole civilization of aliens. From her point of view, we live her "imprisonment" and her first reactions towards the Oankali, but we also see how little by little Lilith understands and adapts to her situation. Even if we as readers may not share her choice, at least Butler gives us the information that leads Lilith to do what she does, and to her decision to stay with the Oankali. Our perception of the Oankali tends to evolve along with Lilith's and our attitude

towards the alien species shifts from one of discomfort to one of understanding, preparing the way for the narrator of the second novel of the trilogy.

Adulthood Rites, the second part of *LB*, is also written with a third-person narrator, but in this case the focalizer is Akin, one of Lilith's construct children. Through Akin we get a glimpse of Lilith's life among the Oankali, but the focus is on the evolution of this construct child during his early childhood until his metamorphosis into a male. This way, Butler shows us the next step in the evolution of humans since Akin is the first male construct child born from a female human. In the first part of the novel, Butler provides a human narrative voice, so that it is easy for readers to identify with Lilith and see how she ends up accepting her role as mother of hybrid children. In this second part, Butler gives us the voice of one of those children who represent the future of humanity, the next step in the evolution programmed by the Oankali. The interesting aspect is that Akin, a hybrid with no need to help humans, decides to sacrifice his life on Earth in exchange for creating a human colony on the harsh ecosystem of Mars, where humans are allowed to live without the interference of the Oankali. This way, Akin becomes the voice of construct children as a narrator, but he also personifies humans' voice with his actions, since his position of power as half Oankali enables him to express humans' concerns in Oankali debates. Therefore, Akin truly embraces difference because he accepts both his alien and his human nature, reconciling them and satisfying the needs of both civilizations.

Akin's voice is important in the development of the novel because he represents the main goal of the Oankali, that is, he encompasses the best features of the Oankali and of humans. On the one hand, Akin rejects hierarchical thinking and the so called human contradiction that had led humanity towards its destruction. In fact, we see he does not really understand violent attitudes and behaviors, like those he encounters in the resisters' village where only white people are allowed, or when he lives the final moments of Phoenix, when the city is burned. On the other hand, he embraces the best features of the Oankali, including the respect for otherness. But he also rejects the paternalistic—and sometimes even oppressive behavior—of the Oankali towards humans, as when the aliens decide to sterilize humanity to protect them. By joining human's determination and the Oankali interest for difference, Akin fights for a world where humans can survive without having to breed with the Oankali. This way, he combines two of the best traits of both species and saves humanity-as-we-know-it from total extinction.

For the third and final part of *LB*, *Imago*, Butler changes her strategy and decides to use a first-person narrator. *Imago* is an example of an autodiegetic narrative since the first-

person narrator is also the main protagonist of the story (Fludernik 150). The narrator and protagonist of this part of the novel is once more one of Lilith's children, Jodahs. Jodahs represents the last step of the gene trade proposed by the aliens—although it happens before it was expected. Jodahs is the first construct ooloi born to a human mother, and since its family fears that the child may be taken from them because it might be considered dangerous, they decide to hide from the rest of the Oankali. Therefore, Jodahs' metamorphosis into an ooloi is the last stage of the trade, just as the word *imago* refers to the last stage of the metamorphosis of an insect—something highlighted by the fact that the Oankali go through metamorphoses themselves. By using a first-person narrator Butler makes it even easier for readers to identify with Jodahs. The most important aspect of Jodahs' is that by becoming an ooloi, he has no gender according to human standards, and that may create a discomforting reaction in the reader at first. We see through the novel how at some points Jodahs decides to adopt a male appearance while at some other points he looks more like a woman. By doing so, Butler destabilizes the category of gender and breaks the binary opposition of male/female creating a new space between the two. In a way, Jodahs invites readers to envision the genderless world Christine Cornea recalls when she talks about Haraway's portrayal of the cyborg, while making us re-imagine the body not as stable entity but as a changing reality. Similarly, Jane Donawerth comments on how Jodahs does not only destabilize the category of gender but it also deconstructs the category of race and species by being able to change its appearance to please the person with whom it is (147) or to adapt to the habitat it lives in.

In this novel, Butler shows us how two different civilizations create a new hybrid one that erases the negative aspects of its predecessors. The result of the cross-breeding is a society that whose values and attitudes can be described as ecofeminist in the sense that difference is truly accepted while nature and otherness are conceived as part of oneself, and the other way around. This evolution is supported by Butler's narrative strategies since she tells us the story from three different perspectives, from three different stages of that evolutionary process that leads to an organic society. The three different narrators continually cross boundaries by shifting the perspective of the *other* and of what we consider as human. This is a persistent feature of Butler's fiction since the author continually calls into question the way in which dominant discourses of race and gender have attempted to fix definitions of *alien* and *other* (Wolmark, *Aliens 29)*. As we can see, in *LB* it is not always easy to distinguish the self from the *other*, to the extent that at the end of the novel readers identify with Jodahs, a character that in its hybridity is neither human nor Oankali, while belonging to both species at the same time.

Butler's strategy of shifting narrators is interesting because she explores the clash between two civilizations offering different points of view, and not only that of the human, and in so doing she "decenters the conventional science fiction story line that prioritizes the human perspective" (Melzer 39). Besides, it is especially interesting to notice that the first narrator she chooses is not a white male encountering an alien species, as in many SF novels, but an African American woman who has been specifically chosen because of her position as the *other* from the perspective of race and gender. But Octavia Butler is only one among the authors that use this strategy of the multiplicity of voices since, as it was pointed out before, it is a common technique among feminist writers.

Among the SF authors that also use multiple narrators to portray the encounter between human and alien is Joan Slonczewski. In her novel *ADIO*, Slonczewski uses a third-person narrator with internal focalization but with five different focalizers: Merwen, Spinel, Nisi, Lystra and Realgar. As Susan Stone-Blackburn comments on her article "Single-Sexed Utopias and Our Two-Sexed Reality," by using five focalizers that belong to different genders and races, the reader is able to identify with "different subject positions" (n.p.). By using the voice of characters that are opposed to each other—voluntarily or involuntarily—Slonczewski invites us to identify with them and to comprehend the position of the *other*. As Diane Coater explains in her work "Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean*: Why Feminist Utopians Might Like Science Fiction": "by use of multiple and diverse linking figures, shifting points of view, and suggestive metaphors Slonczewski gives readers insight into the minds of the various linking figures by juxtaposing frequently shifting points of view" (n.p.). As in the case of the two first two parts of *LB*, in *ADIO* we find a third person narrator that moves the focus from one character to another, so that we get the impression of the main protagonists, knowing their thoughts and their feelings.

The shifting points of view allow readers to see how characters see themselves and how others see them. This is particularly interesting in this novel since Valans consider Sharers inferior creatures that look more like non-human animals than like humans; and Sharers think of Valans also as inferior beings, as sick violent children. Therefore, the perspective of the alien and the human is continually shifting not only in the content of the novel but also in the narrative voice. Even in the first page we see Slonczewski's strategy since we see how she moves the focus from the figure of Merwen to that of Spinel.

The interesting aspect of the five focalizers is that they are all different. Merwen and Lystra are both Sharers and live in Shora. However, their attitude towards Valans, at least at the beginning of the novel, is not the same at all. Merwen travels to Valan territory because

she and her partner Usha want to demonstrate that Valans can also be considered human beings in spite of their violent and disrespectful behavior. But Lystra does not trust Valans and at the beginning of the novel she adopts an offensive attitude against Spinel. At the end of the novel both Merwen and Lystra accept the idea that even though some Valans behave in violent ways, they can be considered human beings. The other two narrative voices of the first half of the novel are those of Spinel and Lady Nisi. These two characters have been mostly educated according to Valan values, even if they belong to very different social categories. Spinel is a humble boy that Merwen and Usha invite to go to Shora, but Nisi is an accommodated woman whose parents trade with Sharers. Although at the beginning of the novel it is Spinel who regards Sharers with a mixture of fear and curiosity, he ends up accepting their lifestyle. Nisi, however, starts the novel being comfortable with Sharers' values but at the ends she behaves in a violent way not paying attention to Sharers' consensus. These two changes of attitude are very interesting since Spinel is a young man who finally decides to live with Sharers in an all-female society in spite of being treated as the *other* when he arrives to the planet. Through his eyes we see how difficult it is for him the process of adaptation to Sharers' habits, but he ends up accepting them whereas Nisi betrays Sharers' ways when she decides to use violence against Valans. Finally, the fifth character on whom the author focuses her attention is Realgar. Realgar represents Valedon in the sense that he is a military man that decides to attack Shora even when Sharers do not respond with violence. Realgar's point of view is that of the invader or the colonizer, and we see through his feelings how little by little the invasion of Shora stops making sense to him, taking into account the public image he was giving by using a group of soldiers to attack women and children who offer no opposition.

The five voices Slonczewski offers are equally important because they enable us to see how the different characters react to otherness and to their own condition as the *other*—as in the case of Spinel. In the case of Butler's *LB*, the three narrators belong to the same family but not to the same species, so they also provide an interesting exploration of what happens when the roles of self and *other* are exchanged. By incorporating multiple voices, these two writers offer readers the possibility of becoming the *other*, and thus of appreciating the similarities between self and the *other*, and of appreciating difference in its uniqueness. In this sense, Patrick Murphy comments that "just as the self enters into language […] so too does the 'other' enter into language and have the potential, as does any entity, to become a 'speaking subject'" ("Ground, Pivot, Motion" 233). As a consequence, Murphy adds that the speaking subject includes "more than humans" ("Ground, Pivot, Motion" 233), creating a dialogue

between self and *other*. This dialogue can be appreciated not only in the several encounters between species that both authors portray but also in the shifting points of view from which those encounters are described.

5.2 THE ENVIRONMENT

One of the most important aspects of both Butler's *Lilith's Brood* and Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* is how the protagonists interact with the environment. As mentioned in their biographies, Butler was concerned with the issue of climate change while Slonczewski, a biologist herself, usually portrays in her novels the relationship between different species and between those species and the world around them. In the two novels it is easy to distinguish between how humans—or in the case of Slonczewski's novel, Valans—[17]relate to the natural world, and how the alien species—the Oankali and the Sharers—interact with their habitats. For this reason, I will first consider the novels separately to analyze the different interactions between humans/aliens and the environment in order to compare them later.

In *LB*, we can see the conflicts that appear in the interaction of humans and aliens. These two civilizations have a different history, a different physical appearance but also a very different way of relating with other creatures and with nature. The first part of the novel is set in Chkahichdahk, a place we imagine as a planet or a spacehisp before we discover that it is both at the same time. The Oankali have no planets of their own, so they travel across the universe on spaceships that look like planets. In fact, these planets are not inorganic entities but living organisms that have been adapted to function as spaceships. When thinking of spaceships, readers tend to imagine them as huge mechanic constructions like the ones found in *Star Trek* or in *Star Wars*. However, Butler reinterprets this SF image and decides to portray spaceships made up of organic materials so that they become some kind of living organism.

When Lilith learns the spaceship is a living organism she is just as surprised as the readers. Once she leaves the room to which she had been confined during her process of adaptation to the Oankali, she discovers that the place she had been staying in was within a structure that resembles a tree:

> The hole in the wall widened as though it were flesh rippling aside, slowly writhing. She was both fascinated and repelled.
>
> "Is it alive?" she asked.
>
> "Yes," he said.
>
> She had beaten it, kicked it, clawed it, tried to bite it. It had been smooth, tough, impenetrable, but slightly giving like the bed and table. It had felt like plastic, cool beneath her hands.
>
> "What is it?" she asked.
>
> "Flesh. More like mine than like yours. Different from mine, too, though. It's...the ship."
>
> "You're kidding. Your ship is alive?"

[17] I refer to Valans as a metaphor for humans because of the similarities between both societies, which will be later developed in section 5.5.

> "Yes. Come out." (*LB* 30)

Lilith is both "fascinated and repelled" with the idea of having been imprisoned within a living organism. But she also feels the need to apologize for her behavior towards the room because in her desperation she had behaved violently against it by kicking and biting. In Lilith's words we can see some kind of remorse since she has realized that her attitude may have caused some harm to the living structure she had been staying in. After being allowed to leave the room, Lilith's fascination and repulsion become curiosity, so she asks Jdahya, the male Oankali with whom she had made contact while staying in the room:

> "Well, is the ship plant or animal?"
> "Both, and more".
> Whatever that meant. "Is it intelligent?"
> "It can be. That part of it is dormant now. But even so, the ship can be chemically induced to perform more functions than you would have the patience to listen to. It does a great deal on its own without monitoring. And it..." He fell silent for a moment, his tentacles smooth against his body. Then he continued, "The human doctor used to say it loved us. There is an affinity, but it's biological – a strong, symbiotic relationship. We serve the ship's needs and it serves ours. It would die without us and we would be planetbound without it. For us, that would eventually mean death." (*LB* 35)

Lilith is confused when she is told the spaceship is both animal and plant, but she realizes that in order to live among the Oankali she needs to open her mind and to leave behind her previous assumptions of biology and chemistry. The Oankali are expert genetic engineers so their understanding of organic elements is different from that of human beings. In fact, the Oankali perception of the world enables Butler's readers to move beyond "the distinction between living creatures, vegetation, and machines" (Goss and Riquelme 443).

The Oankali do not only live on the organic spaceship but they also monitor it using their own bodies. Although we may think that the Oankali modify the planet for their own sake, they sincerely acknowledge the importance of the spaceship for the survival of their alien species. In admitting the symbiotic relationship they have with their spaceship, their mutual dependence is reaffirmed. The Oankali point out that they could not exist without a planet/spaceship, whereas the planet/spaceship would be a dead rock without their monitoring. This recognition of the mutual dependence between a species and its environment is one of the most important features of the Oankali civilization in contrast to the portrayal of humans given by Butler in the novel. When the Oankali start awakening humans and Lilith explains to them that they are travelling in a living spaceship, at first they do not believe her because they think they are still on Earth. So Lilith insists and tells them that "The Oankali use living matter the way we used machinery" (*LB* 140). These words summarize one of the most important aspects of how the Oankali relate with the world around them. Lilith chooses

to use the verb "to use" instead of "to manipulate" and even though we may interpret that the Oankali use living matter for their own benefit—just as we humans use machinery—we will see that the aliens take care not to do any harm to the organic substance used as a way of taking into consideration the planet.

The spaceship Chkahichdahk is a living organism modified by the Oankali but with some autonomy on its own. Although furniture does not appear unless the Oankali request it by touching the surface of one of the structures of the spaceship, there are some functions the spaceship does on its own. Regarding the functioning of the spaceship there is an interesting episode when Lilith travels to a new area of Chkahichdahk she is not familiar with. After having eaten an orange, she decides to bury the peelings in the soil because that is what she usually does in the section of the spaceship she lives in: "She buried her orange peelings, knowing they would be gone within a day, broken down by tendrils of the ship's own living matter" (*LB* 67). Lilith had already watched how the spaceship absorbs organic waste and digests it, but she is surprised when she discovers the peels she has buried do not disappear as expected:

> The soil began to smell, to stink in a way she found hard to connect with oranges. It was probably the smell that drew the Oankali. […]The orange mass had grown to be about three feet across and almost perfecty circular. It had touched one of the fleshy, tentacle pseudoplants and the pseudoplant darkened and lashed about as though in agony. Seeing its violent twisting Lilith forgot that it was not an individual organism. She focused on the fact that it was alive and she had probably caused it pain. She had not merely caused an interesting effect, she had caused harm. (*LB* 68)

Lilith observes how the soil changes its color and seems to repel the orange peelings. Instead of being worried for being discovered in an area she was not supposed to be, Lilith feels empathy towards the spaceship by realizing that it is a living organism that may be suffering because of her behavior. After this event, Lilith is explained that she can only throw her wastes in Kaal, the area of the ship where she lives. This episode is quite significant because it may have been written to make readers reflect on the consequences of throwing away millions of tons of polluting material without even thinking of recycling them. Lilith is able to contemplate the effects on the surface of Chkahichdahk of what seems something like poisoning, and this way Octavia Butler invites us to imagine the slow process of disintegration of things made of inorganic materials like plastic. But apart from this reflection, the episode is significant because it makes us wonder why Lilith's organic garbage is only absorbed in the area she lives in. It may be that since the Oankali keep such a direct relationship with their spaceship, each family develops a special—and symbiotic—

relationship with the particular area of the spaceship they inhabit. In this manner, each area is chemically altered to recognize the particular biochemistry of its inhabitants, creating a kind of biological and biochemical sense of place that is also transferred to Lilith.

The second and third parts of the trilogy, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*, are no longer set on the spaceship. In these two novels, the events take place in different villages on Earth, in areas previously cleaned and prepared to be inhabited by humans. Among these villages, we can find two types: the so called "trade villages" inhabited by the Oankali and the humans with whom the alien breed, and the resister villages. It is in the trade villages where the hybrid families live, and in these places we can find the same material the spaceship has, thus making it possible to build structures out of this substance. The life in these villages is based on taking care of the family and on agricultural practices. In fact, when one of the resisters, Tino, arrives at the village where Lilith's family lives, Lo, he is surprised to discover their humble lifestyle: "It's primitive! You live like savages! (…) Why don't you at least build real houses and get rid of these shacks! You should see what we have! And… Hell, you have spaceships. *How can you live this way!"* (*LB* 280; emphasis in original). Tino had imagined that the Oankali, a technologically advanced civilization, would have built factories or buildings instead of simple houses. Tino, as many readers, had supposed that if the Oankali were able to travel across the space and perform highly effective genetic engineering, they should have been able to build magnificent villages. Instead, trade villages are based on the same symbiotic relationship that the Oankali have with their spaceships, so that instead of building things, both the aliens and the humans in these villages make things grow: "We didn't build this house, Tino, we grew it. Nikanj provided the seed; we cleared the land; everyone who was going to live here trained the walls and made them aware of us" (*LB* 283). As in the spaceship, the houses they live in are a kind of organism between animal and plant, and not an inorganic structure. Again, as in the spaceship, we can perceive a certain affinity between the house and the family that lives in it. At this point we may wonder to what extent the Earth is still the Earth since these villages are made of strange materials, but we have to take into account that since the Earth had been seriously polluted, the Oankali have had to alter the chemistry and biology of the planet to make it fit for human life. Even though we may interpret that Butler is suggesting a return to a pre-industrial lifestyle, I think that she favors progress but in a sustainable way, by substituting pollution and mechanic devices with organic infrastructures and symbiotic relationships.

Even though Tino decides to stay in Lo with Lilith, he continues to think with his human paradigm: that they have not built larger structures because of the absence of men.

This thought is one example of Tino's obsession—and resisters' obsession in general—with buildings and inorganic structures as a symbol of progress. However, one of the other men staying at Lo answers him: "We build ourselves,' Wray said. 'We're building a new way of life here'" (*LB* 282). Wray talks about a "new way of life" that means leaving behind humanity as we know it. On the one hand, humans trade their genetic materials with the Oankali to create a new hybrid species, and that implies the end of the *homo sapiens* as such. On the other hand, this new way of life also means that humanity needs to change its worldview in order to embrace new values and attitudes not based on hierarchical thought. Those who want to accept the trade proposed by the Oankali are influenced by the events that took place just before the arrival of the Oankali, that is, the nuclear war that resulted in the near destruction of the Earth. These humans seem to have realized that the Oankali were not so mistaken when they described humans as genetically flawed. Although most humans, and not only resisters, reject the idea of being flawed as species, they acknowledge that humans, driven by violence and hierarchical thought, had almost annihilated the Earth and the other species that inhabit the planet.

Human resisters refuse to live with the Oankali and once on Earth, they start building their own cities. These cities are quite similar to those which existed before the war, because humans try to recover any remains they can find from their previous lifestyle. Some of the humans in the trade villages cannot understand why, after having been given a longer and healthier life, humans were going back to the violence that had characterized humanity: "They're as close to immortal as a Human being has ever been, and all they can think of to do is build useless houses and kill one another" (*LB* 280). With these words, one of the characters criticizes how humans do not take advantage of the second opportunity offered to them. Instead, the resisters spoil this situation by trying to return to the period before the war, rebuilding big cities, generating pollution and producing weapons to attack others. Butler seems to imply that unless humans adopt alternative lifestyles, we are condemned to violence and to the destruction of the planet. The conflict here is that humans tend to associate progress with high building and complex urban areas. In our society, industrialization seems to be associated with progress. But industrialization most of the times entails pollution and the exploitation of the Earth's resources. However, for the Oankali and those who decide to live with them, progress is based on a symbiotic relationship with nature rather than an exploitative one.

Since human evolution has been characterized by their ability to build more and more complex structures, the humans of the novel continue to measure their civilized nature on the

same terms. Thus, progress and civilization seem to be parallel to complexity. But the Oankali offer a new idea of progress that is related to a more respectful relationship with the environment. This way, the Oankali measure progress in terms of sustainability, echoing their preference for organic materials in contrast with human's use of inorganic machinery. Therefore, the conceptual framework of each society lies at the basis of what they conceive as progress. On the one hand, the Oankali encourage a sustainable development and a healthy relationship with the *other* in response to their belief in the importance of any organic life form. On the other hand, humans value inorganic complex structures as a reflection of their domination over nature and the higher value awarded to culture in the culture/nature dualism. This two views of progress can also be interpreted in terms of degrowth. Those who support degrowth have largely criticized how our consumerist society neglects the environment and biodiversity. In contrast, those in favor of degrowth vindicate a reduction in production and consumerism, while promoting social values of coexistence and environmental awareness (Prádanos 79).

Reconsidering the idea of the symbiotic relationship of the Oankali with the environment, we can compare it to that of humans with the Earth, which could be defined as one of parasitism. One of the reasons why the Oankali have developed such a symbiotic relationship is related to the fact that they are aware of the harm they may cause their spaceship or their trade village. This is illustrated in the words of Jodahs when he refers to the trade village he lives in: "And all that I did to Lo, I also did to myself. But it was Lo that I felt guilty about. Lo was parent, sibling, home. It was the world I had been born into (…). I would have done anything to avoid giving Lo pain" (*LB* 554). In this statement, Jodahs talks about Lo not as an inorganic being but as a living entity that is able to feel harm. For Jodahs, the trade village Lo is more than a place to live, it is described as a member of his own family and as such, he would be unable to harm it.

Another important aspect of the relationship of the Oankali to the environment—and especially considering their spaceships—is that their image of nature is similar to that exposed by James Lovelock in his Gaia hypothesis. Taking into account that this hypothesis emerged in the late 1960s, Octavia Butler could have been familiar with the idea of the Earth behaving as a living organism which is able to monitor and implement its processes in an optimal way. According to Lovelock, the Earth can be described as an entity that autonomously regulates itself by means of the flora, fauna and microorganisms (Sagan and Margulis 353). The Oankali interact with the natural world in such a way that the stability of the ecosystem does not only depend on the spaceship/trade village itself but also on the

genetic modifications carried out in it by the alien species. However, the behavior of the spaceship, which is able to incorporate waste, clearly echoes the idea stated by Lovelock that the Earth can be seen "as a self-regulating system, analogous to a living organism" (Garrard 173). Christa Grewe-Volpp comments on how the lifestyle of the Oankali concerning their spaceships and villages relates to Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis: "Together the spaceships and the aliens form a living unity strongly reminiscent of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis" (159).

In general terms, many ecofeminists embrace the conception of the Earth presented in the Gaia hypothesis, since the planet is presented as a living organism that depends on its inhabitants in the same way these inhabitants depend on it. But as it was mentioned in the section of this dissertation devoted to Gaia, some ecofeminists and ecologists reject Lovelock's theory because it implies that no matter how much we harm the Earth, the planet will always heal itself. Some supporters of the Gaia hypothesis have pointed out that, even if the Earth is able to heal itself to some extent, human actions may go beyond this healing capacity: "But there seems little doubt that human impact on Gaian systems could, depending on its intensity and its location, throw the whole set of webs into a new phase of non-equilibrium, i.e. Gaia could "flip" from one state to another rather than undergo any form of gradual transition" (Simmons 33). Just as the events of the novel show, human behavior towards the Earth has been based on harmful activities that have dangerous consequences, such as almost annihilating life on the planet. In our real world, this phase of non-equilibrium Simmons describes is perceived in the current environmental crisis.

Simmons talks about certain human impacts on the Earth that, depending on their intensity and location, can alter the planet cycles. In her trilogy, Butler does not only show a species whose relationship towards the natural world is one of mutual dependence, but she also presents what happens to the Earth after the nuclear war provoked by humans. In this contrast between the two civilizations, Butler opposes the healthy and respectful lifestyle of the Oankali with the destructive human one. Although the novels take place after a nuclear war, there are several references to the events that happen both before and during the war. The nuclear war has several consequences for the Earth—and although we may at first focus our attention on the deaths of millions and millions of people—we cannot forget the natural catastrophe that nuclear wars entail for other species and for the planet itself. Once missiles reach their target, the components they are made of do not only destroy the area but they also produce devastating effects in other areas because of radiation. In Butler's trilogy the Oankali

refer to the Earth after the nuclear war as a wounded organism that needs time to be healed because of the damages that humans have produced with their war (*LB* 18).

At the basis of the opposition between the Oankali and humans regarding the environment we can find the very way they conceive their surroundings. On the one hand, the Oankali respect nature because they understand its complexity and their mutual dependence on it. The Oankali state several times that without the spaceship, they could not live, in the same way that the spaceship could not survive without them. On the other hand, we face humans whose hierarchical attitude has placed nature at a lower level, being thus subjugated to human desires. Instead of recognizing their dependence on the Earth, humans mistreat it and exploit it for their own purposes without taking into account the consequences. Grewe-Volpp comments on this anthropocentric view of nature:

> Humans on earth clearly did not understand their indivisible interdependence with Gaia, otherwise they would not have caused a nuclear war with fatal ecological consequences for themselves and for earth others. The Oankali, on the other hand, treat their environment with the care and respect they themselves desire to be treated with. (159)

Therefore, the relationship with the environment is primarily based on how we conceive the world we live in, whether a dead organism we master, or a living entity on which we depend and thus must respect. In the case of Butler's trilogy, the Oankali believe humans are flawed because of their hierarchical thought. These humans are portrayed as anthropocentric, an attitude rejected by ecofeminists as well as by deep ecologists and other environmentalists. Anthropocentrism is considered a negative attitude since it presupposes that humans are placed over the rest of organisms of the Earth, an argument that thus justifies the exploitation of animals, plants and natural resources in general. This displacement of humans from nature echoes Plumwood's idea that humans do not realize their embeddedness in the ecosystem (*Environmental Culture* 97). This behavior clearly contrasts with that of the Oankali, who do not believe in hierarchies and who recognize their dependence on nature for their survival. The attitude developed by the Oankali contrasts with human anthropocentrism and is quite similar to what Sagan and Margulis posit in their article "In terms of biophilia[18] and biodiversity, we believe it is better to think of ourselves as all just a part of Gaia and not even, in any way, the most important part" (Sagan and Margulis 351). Sagan and Margulis represent what environmentalists think about the place humans occupy in the order of things. In order to respect biodiversity and to be able to feel empathy towards non-human organisms,

[18] Biophilia is "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms. Innate means hereditary and hence part of ultimate human nature" (Wilson 31).

it is necessary to understand that humans are not at the centre of creation but that they are just one part of it, and that they depend on the other parts in order to survive.

As Butler denounces in her trilogy, the relationship of humans with their environment has proved disastrous in the last century. Because of this, environmentalists—including ecofeminists—demand a change in our conceptual framework so that nature stops being considered something alien to us. Thus, we need to recognize that we are dependent on the habitat we live in, as well as on the rest of species with which we share this habitat. Peter Wenz comments on this shift of attitude with the following words: "Thinking of ourselves as part of a larger living entity may suggest humility and inspire caution in our treatment of the earth and of other species. It may also help to justify holistic nonanthropocentric concerns and thus costly attempts to avoid extinguishing species" (136). Then, as Peter Wenz explains echoing the concerns of environmentalists in general, we need to change our conception of the role of humans in this world so that we can understand that we are not the most important species on the Earth but just part of a complex yet interdependent entity.

Octavia Butler's *LB* is an example of how feminist SF is a vehicle for expressing environmental concerns. In the previous analysis we have seen how the Oankali lifestyle clearly contrasts with that of humans in their relationship with the environment. Whereas the Oankali are environmentally aware of their dependence on the natural world for the survival, the portrayal of humans in the novel is quite negative in this sense. In the following pages we will explore how Slonczewski's *ADIO* presents a similar situation with the contrast between Valans—with their exploitation of nature—and Sharers—with their belief in the interdependence of living organisms.

The genre of SF poses a double challenge to the reader. On the one hand, as in all literary works, readers have to go through the text to see what the author is trying to say, decoding the message or the intention of the writer. On the other hand, SF readers have to make a special effort to place themselves in the imagined setting the writer has created for his or her story. In Butler's *LB*, readers have to imagine what it would mean to have the Earth almost destroyed by a nuclear war just to be saved by an alien civilization with which surviving humans have to breed. In the case of Slonczewski's *ADIO* readers are invited to imagine what it would be like to live on a planet completely covered by water. As Slonczewski and Levy comment, *ADIO* presents a really complex ecosystem full of organisms existent and non-existent in our world (184). The ability of the author to portray

this world in such a convincing way may be the result of her studies in chemistry and biology, which enable her to describe—or invent—organisms full of detail and life.

The most striking aspect of the book regarding the environment is the ecosystem of Shora. The other places in which the novel is set resemble cities like the ones with find in our world, but Shora, the ocean-moon, plays such an important role in the novel that it may be considered a character on its own. In the first pages of the novel we a brief description that summarizes the impression the planet causes: "Shora, sapphire of the night sky, world whose sea had no shore" (*ADIO* 5). The moon Shora is completely covered by an ocean, which makes it resemble a blue gem shining in the darkness. Although in this first description Shora is compared to a type of stone, throughout the book the moon is usually referred to as a living entity, for example: "It was good to remember the nearness of Shora, to feel herself a part of this one sea of life" (*ADIO* 259). Shora, in spite of being a vast mass of water, is usually described as a living being because of the multiple living creatures that inhabit its ocean.

Spinel, the Valan boy Merwen and Usha take to Shora, represents readers when he is surprised at realizing that Shora is indeed an ocean-moon: "Something nagged at him; something was missing, he did not know what. As he watched the sea, it came to him. There were no landmarks of any kind, just the flat horizon. It was hardly safe, out on the open sea in such a small craft, and with what navigation?" (*ADIO* 53). Spinel is not only surprised but even afraid of what he may find. Spinel's feelings go beyond being afraid of falling from the small boat or of the stability of the rafts where Sharers live, he is afraid of the new way of life he will have to get used to if he wants to survive in Shora. However, as the story develops, Spinel feels more and more comfortable living on rafts and swimming in Shora. At the beginning of the novel he is not able to conceive his "home" without a shore, but when later on in the story Spinel realizes that he belongs to the ocean-moon and to its rafts: "But there were rafts beyond the horizon, where he belonged. Maybe the land beyond death was like that, a living raft on the infinite sea" (*ADIO* 296).

During his first stay on Shora, Spinel lives on the raft[19] that Merwen and Usha share with their daughters. Each raft is named with the name the sea chooses for it and in this case the raft is called Raia-el (*ADIO* 51). As the other rafts, Raia-el is a solid structure on the surface of water with several underwater tunnels, which Sharers use as life-shaping rooms or laboratories. This raft is described as a house with different panels made of woven seasilk and decorated with fungus. In the author's analysis of her own novel Slonczewski explains that

[19] Although Slonczewski uses the term raft, Sharers' houses do not really resemble the structures we refer to as rafts.

these rafts are hydroponic, which means that they are able to grow in water thanks to nutrients, without needing soil. These rafts are trees that "grow by extending buoyant roots deep into the water, then putting out leafy branches above;" however, they do not grow a trunk but they rather grow in girth so that they are wider as years go by (Slonczewski, "Study" n.p.). As the author states, these raft-trees were inspired by mangrove forests: "Mangrove trees hold soil and support the world's most fertile wetland ecosystems in South America, Asia, and Australia. In these watery forests, people gather crabs and fish while sometimes living upon 'floating villages,' much as the Sharers do" (Slonczewski, "Study" n.p.). Thus we appreciate that even if Sharers' houses at first seem alien to us, they are in fact based on living organisms that exist in our world.

For Sharers rafts are more than their houses, since it is in their tunnels where they keep their lifeshaping rooms. According to Slonczeski's "Study Guide" every cell in the raft contains all the genetic knowledge Sharers possess, so in order to lose it all it would be necessary to destroy the raft completely. When Valan soldiers and scientists start to search the rafts looking for Sharer laboratories, they are not able to find anything that resembles their own scientific facilities. Only some of the scientists realize that for Sharers scientific research is not an independent discipline for a small elite but part of their everyday life. Only when they understand this, they are able to accept that Sharers' laboratories—or lifeshaping rooms, as they call them—are just another room of their house-rafts.

Although most of the novel takes place on Shora, some Valan cities are also described, creating a contrast between the two settings. Whereas Shora has no cities and rafts are spread throughout the surface of the ocean-moon, Valedon is divided into cities of different size and quality. For example, Iridis is a great city with many wealthy people living in it, while Chrysoport is a humble place full of workers—as Spinel's own family. Another difference is that Shora is usually portrayed as being full of life with its organic house-rafts and with its ocean populated by millions of different creatures. Valedon, however, is presented as a cold place with inorganic structures and inhabitants. For example, when Nisi contemplates Iridis from a helicopter, she thinks of the city as a "massive crystal garden" (*ADIO* 33). This descriptive phrase is interesting for its juxtaposition of an organic element with an inorganic one. Although Nisi thinks of a natural element such as a garden is, she specifies it is a crystal one.

The portrayal of Shora as a living organism in contrast with inorganic Valan cities somehow echoes Lovelock's description of the Earth as a living being in his Gaia hypothesis. Just as we mentioned that Butler may have been familiar with Lovelock's theory, it is even

more probable for Slonczewski—because of her training as a scientist—to have been familiar with Lovelock's ideas when she wrote *ADIO*. In fact, the parallelisms between Shora and Gaia are quite significant from an ecofeminist perspective. Both Gaia and Shora have some sort of dual nature: on the one hand, they are planets; on the other hand, they represent a superior being that holds together a network of living beings, including humans. This concept of an interconnected network is quite present in Sharers' thought since they realize that their survival depends on the survival of the lesser beings that are part of that network. Therefore, the idea of equilibrium in an ecosystem is essentially based on the recognition of the interdependence and interconnection of the members of that ecosystem. In his Gaia hypothesis, James Lovelock comments on this interconnectedness of life but from a scientific point of view: "the atmosphere, the oceans, the climate and the crust of the Earth are regulated at a state comfortable for life because of the behavior of living organisms" (Lovelock 19). According to Lovelock, the stability of a system, in this case Gaia as a metaphor for the Earth, depends on how its elements work together to maintain that equilibrium. But Slonczewki's novel does not take into account the controversial aspect of Lovelock's hypothesis that implies that the Earth is able to heal on her own. In *ADIO* the well-being of the planet is not something Sharers take for granted. Although their manipulation of the ecosystem may be controversial, as we will see later in the ecofeminist analysis of the novel, they understand that the stability of an ecosystem depends on how all its elements work together for that purpose. This idea is closely related with the ecofeminist notion of the interconnectedness of living beings and how what happens to some of them may affect the whole world. An example of the importance of this connection between the animals and plants of Shora can be seen when the Valan invaders start producing pests to kill some dangerous creatures and Sharers are horrified because they believe that these actions, despite killing what are considered as harmful creatures, "threaten not only the livelihood but the very center of being of every Sharer of Shora" (*ADIO* 90).

For this reason, Sharers—who are expert genetic engineers—do not alter the ecosystem of Shora even if that means danger for their lives: "the people of Shora, who call themselves 'Sharers', claim to resist terraforming their planet, preferring even to be eaten alive by predators rather than harm the balance of nature" (Slonczewski and Levy 184). For example, seaswallowers—dangerous sea creatures that travel across the planet twice a year—threaten Sharers' lives by destroying everything around them. Instead of producing some product to repel them, they prefer not to intervene: "'Sharers know their own limits; that, perhaps, is their greatest strength. They don't like to alter the life balance. Something worse

might replace seaswallowers…' Every 'lesser sharer' had its purpose, Sharers claimed" (*ADIO* 90). In fact, when Valans invade the planet and decide to get rid of seaswallowers they create a plague against them with fatal consequences:

> The overcrowded raft seedlings festered and oozed scum that poisoned fish and octopus, while fleshborers devoured what little remained. Then mudworms bloomed and turned the sea brown, without fish to consume them; and fanwings that skimmed the sea for food sickened from the mudworms, until flocks of their bodies drifted on the raft seedlings. The one thing worse than swallower time was the time when swallowers failed to appear. (*ADIO* 287)

Sharer's understanding of how an ecosystem functions is quite significant since this way they are aware of the role they play in it, and because of this they prefer not to alter the equilibrium of the planet. This idea mirrors the words of Pardot Kynes, a Planetory Ecologist in Frank Herbert's *Dune*—one of the works that influenced Slonczewski: "That's why the highest function of ecology is the understanding of consequences" (482). Taking into account these words and the way Sharers relate to their environment, one can easily describe them as ecologists since they understand that altering the cycles of nature can entail unexpected and terrible consequences.

In spite of the respectful attitude of Sharers towards human and non-human creatures, there is a natural element that provokes their fear. Shares are afraid of stones because stones have never felt life in them. Since Sharers are used to dealing with organic organisms, and because the only stone they see is at the bottom of the sea "where the dead dwell" (*ADIO* 16), they truly abhor stones. But most Sharers do not only feel fear stones, but also some kind of curiosity that drives some of them into "stonesickness". Sharers suffering from stonesickness are obsessed with acquiring stones from the Valan traders of Shora, who sell them even knowing about the sickness. Sick Sharers usually forget about other Sharers and live in separate rafts without talking to anyone. This is the case of Rilwen, who had been Lystra's lovesharer for a time until she started suffering from "stonesickness": "the inexplicable craving for those objects shaped by death" (*ADIO* 73). But stones stop being a secret when Spinel shows Sharers that they have nothing to fear from stones, that they are just a different arrangement of the same chemical substances that living organisms have in their bodies. This way Sharers are able to understand stones, an object they had never paid attention to from a scientific point of view because of their lack of life.

In this novel, as in the case of Butler's trilogy we can also see a strong contrast between how Sharers relate to their environment and how Valans do. Although Valedon is not like the Earth, it is very easy for readers to see the similarities between Valans and humans on Earth considering their exploitation of natural resources and their disregard for pollution and

the loss of biodiversity. For most Sharers, Valans are "sick children" because they use violence instead of words, but also because they do not respect the world they live in. For example, Lystra talks to Spinel about how Valans mismanage the environment in contrast to Sharers' respect for it: "What's the use, if you can't even manage your own planet properly? Everything is plentiful the first time you share it, but once we come to need it, it vanishes" (*ADIO 71*). Sharers understand that the equilibrium of their planet is at stake and that any interference can alter the whole balance of the planet and the creatures that live in it.

As we have seen in this analysis, the environment plays an essential role in both *LB* and in *ADIO*. As in many other SF works, the natural world is a key element in the development of the story. In *LB* the relationship of the Oankali—and humans later—with the spaceship and the trade villages is interesting in terms of how they conceive nature. The settings of the novel are alive, and the relationship of mutual dependence with their inhabitants makes readers wonder about human mismanagement of the Earth. Similarly, in *ADIO* the ocean-moon Shora is a character in its own right since it shapes and affects the lives of Sharers, but also of those who live there for some time—traders, Spinel and the Valan army. Sharers' bodies and lifestyle are adapted to the ecosystem of Shora, contrasting with the stubbornness of Valans to ignore—or even alter—the cycles of the planet for their own sake.

In both novels we also find a contrast between two different ways of interacting with the environment. In *LB,* the Oankali defend a symbiotic relationship with their surroundings thus creating an interdependence that is vital for the survival of both. Similarly, in *ADIO* Sharers conceive Shora as a web of life of which they are just a small part, and not at all more important than any of the other creatures. The contrast in these novels is represented by humans in *LB* and Valans in *ADIO,* because their oppressive conceptual frameworks clash with the alternative lifestyles of the alien civilizations. The humans of *LB* are responsible for the destruction of the Earth with a nuclear war, but even when they are given a second chance they continue poisoning the planet by recovering plastic from the remains of old cities. In a similar way, Valans disregard the cycles of nature by exploiting resources until their extinction, and by indiscriminately altering the ecosystem with the introduction of pests to repel hostile animal species.

Therefore, both novels portray two different lifestyles that invite readers to question their own. On the one hand, the Oankali and Sharers base their relationship with the environment on symbiosis and in the belief on the interconnectedness of life forms. This way, these alien civilizations acknowledge their dependence on other creatures and on their

surroundings as well. On the other hand, humans in *LB* and Valans in *ADIO* exemplify the mismanagement of nature as a result of their anthropocentric behavior. Whereas many of the humans in *LB* seem obsessed with violence—not taking into account its consequences for nature—before and after the war, Valans are only interested in exploiting the resources of Shora and in learning about Sharers' science. This way Butler and Sloncewski illustrate different forms of interacting with the environment so that readers can reflect on them to draw their own conclusions. Lilith—among other humans—in *LB* and Spinel in *ADIO* decide to leave behind their previous lifestyles in order to embrace an alternative way of life that is based on the recognition of our dependence on the natural world, thus entailing a sustainable and respectful relationship with it.

5.3 SCIENCE

One of the main themes in both Butler's *LB* and in Slonczewski's *ADIO* is that of science, and genetic engineering in particular. For both alien species, the Oankali and Sharers, science is part of their everyday routine. On the one hand, the Oankali body is anatomically shaped to carry out scientific experiments and medical operations, as well as genetic modifications. On the other hand, Sharers carry out scientific experiments on their own house-rafts, where they have a lifeshaping room devoted to this purpose. Because of the particularities of the Oankali body, these aliens understand their surroundings by analyzing their biochemical components with their own sensory organs. Similarly, Sharers use their laboratories to explore living forms in order to understand how they work. Even though these practices may result dangerous because of their possible consequences, both species carry out their scientific experiments without harming other species—or at least they try not to. In this section we will explore how science is represented in both novels and how the different groups of characters interpret science. We will also deal with genetic engineering and with its role in the breeding of the Oankali and Sharers.

When Lilith leaves her "prison" and starts learning things from the Oankali, she is a bit surprised at discovering how important science is—and especially biology and chemistry—for the survival of the alien species. The Oankali to explain her that within their society, the ooloi, who have no gender, are the ones who undertake the most complex scientific explorations and operations. Before knowing of the special features of the anatomy of an ooloi, she imagines "dying humans caged and every groan and contortion closely observed" and "dissections of living subjects as well as dead ones" and "treatable diseases being allowed to run their grisly courses in order for ooloi to learn" (*LB* 22). The interesting thing in these imagined thoughts is that Lilith is basing her imagination on human behavior. Before having a deeper interaction with the Oankali, and with the ooloi in particular, Lilith imagines their scientific experiments are similar to the most horrible ones carried out by humans in the past. For example, when she talks about vivisections and treatable diseases not being treated just to see the results, she may be echoing the human experimentation that took place in the 20th century. We may point out the experiments in sterilizing people with certain disabilities during the first half of the twentieth century in countries such as the United States. During the Second World War, human experimentation was a common practice in Nazi concentration camps and in the Unit 731 of the Imperial Japanese Army, whose research

included the study of consequences of biological and chemical warfare with practices such as vivisection or amputation. Also after the war, American doctors were in charge of studying the consequences of the explosions of the nuclear bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose populations had been used as some sort of experimental subjects. Taking into account this information, it is particularly interesting how Lilith thinks of real human experiments when imagining how the Oankali do their scientific research. However, as Lilith becomes more familiar with the Oankali lifestyle and their science, she discovers that their experimentation does not entail pain or suffering because the Oankali would also suffer that pain in their own bodies.

Most of the scientific research done by the Oankali is based on genetic engineering. However, the Oankali point out that the way they conceive genetics is very different from the way humans do: "We do what you would call genetic engineering. We know you had begun to do it yourselves a little, but it's foreign to you. We do it naturally. We *must* do it. It renews us, enables us to survive as an evolving species instead of specializing ourselves into extinction or stagnation" (*LB* 40; emphasis in original). For the Oankali genetic engineering is not a means to achieve something, as in the case of humans, but a practice on which the Oankali depend for their survival. Although Lilith sees some positive things in the genetic experiments of the Oankali with humans—life becomes longer, injuries heal faster, bodies become stronger and more resistant—she finds it quite controversial to have things done to human beings without their informed consent: "It's one thing to do it to a plant. It's another to do it to intelligent, self-aware beings" (*LB* 55).

For the Oankali, genetic engineering is the basis of their lifestyle and of their architecture. Instead of building metallic structures, the Oankali modify different substances, most of them a mixture of plant and animal, so that their bodies "tell" them to grow into precise shapes and for different uses. For example, if they need to grow a table or a door in a wall, they touch the structure with their hands or their tentacles so that it reads the information in a biological or chemical way. This is how the structure recognizes the code and builds the furniture or the element requested. Lilith is particularly curious about this technique since human architecture is based on metallic substances or plastic: "'Nikanj, do you ever build machinery? Temper with metal and plastic instead of living things?' 'We do that when we have to. We…don't like it. There's no trade'" (*LB* 85). Therefore the Oankali, who can be considered a superior species regarding their scientific knowledge, prefer to work with organic substances rather than with inorganic ones, something that attracts our attention as an organic species striving for technology and overspecialization. According to Adam Roberts,

this technology that makes bodies intersect with machines is especially interesting for SF readers, who usually associate development with inorganic technology (111). However, manipulating living matter for building structures may cause damage, but this is not something that happens to the Oankali since their own bodies would receive any pain they cause others. For this reason, they are especially careful when they make chemical or biological changes. Besides, the manipulation of living matter produces no pollution at all whereas the use of machinery usually entails the production of waste products that may result pollutant and even lethal for living. For this reason, the inorganic industry of the Oankali is completely sustainable as a contrast with the plastic and other toxic wastes that some resisters find in the remnants of ancient human cities.

As expert genetic engineers, the Oankali are able to read and modify genes to make them work for their own goals. This can be seen in their special interest in the ability of humans to grow cancers. For human beings cancer is associated with illness, pain and death, but for the Oankali, cancer cells offer a whole world of possibilities. When Lilith awakes, she discovers a small scar in her belly, what makes her wonder with some terror what has been done to her body without her knowledge. Later on, when she talks with the Oankali, she is told that she had a cancer growing in her body, something that does not surprise her since "two of her aunts had had it and her grandmother had been operated on three times for it" (*LB* 21). The Oankali understood that those cells would put Lilith's health at a risk, so they gave Lilith's body instructions to reabsorb the cancer (*LB 22*). This measure of control is rather interesting since the Oankali do not eliminate cancer cells, because they may reproduce again in the future, but they induce human bodies and human cells to reabsorb the cancer in order to make it disappear by normalizing it: "Correcting genes have been inserted into your cells, and your cells have accepted and replicated them. Now you won't grow cancers by accident" (*LB* 31). In their travels across the universe the Oankali had never faced a civilization like humanity, and had never dealt with a disease as cancer, in which normal cells become malignant and start "polluting" the body. Oankali study the nature of cancer cells and how they grow and multiply because they see them as a positive thing because of their possibilities for re-growing amputated limbs.

Despite the positive aspects of the Oankali experiments, we also have to take into account the controversy of not asking for the patient's opinion. For example, Lilith is not surprised when she learns she had cancer, but she is terribly afraid when she realizes that "Even her flesh could be cut and stitched without her consent or knowledge" (*LB* 6). Lilith

realizes that the Oankali are somehow treating humans in a patronizing way as if they were children instead of adults, or even as animals that cannot rationalize.

> This was one more thing they had done to her body without her consent and supposedly for her own good. "We used to treat animals that way", she muttered bitterly.
> "What? he said
> "We did things to them—inoculations, surgery, isolation—all for their own good. We wanted them healthy and protected—sometimes so we could eat them later. (33)

Lilith compares the situation of humans on the Oankali spaceship with that of animals in experimentation by considering that the supposed goal was the wellbeing of the species under observation. Lilith is troubled by this practice mainly because of the lack of consent; it is something she cannot control. Even if the operations and genetic modifications are implemented because they will help humans to become healthier and stronger, Butler criticizes that the Oankali are behaving according to their beliefs, without taking into account humans' point of view and feelings. For this reason, Lilith wonders if the Oankali have secret purposes for the genetic trade they propose to humans, especially because of their apparent lack of concern for human's opinion (Goss and Riquelme 448). This patronizing behavior of the aliens seems to be related to their belief that humans are flawed and that they are in no position to decide. Besides, since individualism is not part of the Oankali culture, they are unable to understand how humans feel when they realize that choices have been made for them without taking into account their opinion.

Throughout the novel there are several examples of how the Oankali modify human genes so that they live longer and become more resistant to disease, but the most interesting one is the general sterilization to which humans are subjected until they accept the trade the Oankali propose. Since the Oankali believe that humans are genetically flawed, they have sterilized them as a safety measure until they accept the trade, in which the process of reproduction will be monitored by an ooloi in order to eliminate the dangerous genes.

> "Have you done something to me? Am I sterile?"
> "Your people called it birth control. You are slightly changed. It was done while you slept, as it was done to all humans at first. It will be undone eventually."
> "When?" she asked bitterly. "When you're ready to breed me?"
> "No. When you're ready. Only then."
> "Who decides? You?"
> "You, Lilith. You."(*LB* 98)

Although at that point of the novel the Oankali tell Lilith that she will have children whenever she decides to, at the end of the first part she is suddenly told that Nikanj made her pregnant without her noticing it, without her consent, thus contradicting what they had told her before.

The massive sterilization to which the Oankali subject humans on the grounds of a genetic flaw also echoes human practices of the last century and of our days. The eugenic laws promulgated by the Nazi government of Hitler provoked the massive sterilization of handicapped people as well as that of people of different ethnic groups considered inferior to Aryans. In fact, Lilith mentions the eugenics program of Hitler before and during World War Two thanks to the Law for the Prevention of Heredity Diseased Offspring, which resulted in the sterilization of thousands of people who were mentally handicapped, epileptic, blind, deaf, or even alcoholic (*LB* 143). But similar experiments were implemented in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century when "the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feebleminded Persons (renamed as the American Association on Mental Retardation in 1987) took serious measures in order to reduce the numbers of mentally handicapped persons through forced birth control" (Sanz Alonso 884). Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva also point out the massive sterilization campaign that India undertook from 1975 to 1977 "in the course of which millions of people were forcibly sterilized" (190). Similarly, the two authors also comment on the Chinese population policy "leading to female infanticide and foeticide" (Mies and Shiva 190).

One of the examples in which we can see how the lack of consent is put into practice regarding reproduction is when Lilith meets the first human after she is awakened. This human tells Lilith that the Oankali have been using human reproductive cells without consent to breed babies:

> They took stuff from men and women who didn't even know each other and put it together and made babies in women who never knew the mother or the father of their kid – and who maybe never got to know the kid. Or maybe they grew the baby in another kind of animal. They have animals they can adjust to – to incubate human fetuses, as they say. Or maybe they don't even worry about men and women. Maybe they just scrape some skin from one person and make babies out of it – cloning, you know. Or maybe they use one of their prints – and don't ask me what a print is. But if they've got one of you, they can use it to make another you even if you've been dead for a hundred years and they haven't got anything at all left of your body. And that's just the start. They can make people in ways I don't even know how to talk about. Only thing they can't do, it seems, is let us alone. (*LB* 94)

After that conversation the man starts to behave violently, full of rage and resentment because of his lack of control over his own life. He tells Lilith that he is supposed to be the father of around seventy children, according to what the Oankali had told him, what makes Lilith feel pity for him while wanting to be far from him. A minute later, the man tries to rape her until the Oankali rescue her. The Oankali breed humans without their consent because they need more individuals for their trade, since the survivors they rescued from Earth were just a few. Since the Oankali need the genetic trade for their survival, they need as much genetic material

as possible, so they use human reproductive cells to produce more humans. The interesting aspect of using awakened humans is that the Oankali could have left them in suspended animation, since they have been already studied and the aliens had their genetic print so that they could be cloned (Peppers n.p.). Instead of this, the Oankali insist on awaking some humans, training them to survive and take them to the Earth. It would appear that the Oankali prefer to interact with humans so that they can get a better idea of what being human is. Even though they already had human genetic codes, they wanted to see how humans interact among themselves and with other humans, thus becoming the subjects in some sort of social experiment.

Once the Oankali have awakened enough humans, and as soon as some areas of the Earth are prepared for humans to live there, the aliens take humans to the planet in order to establish trade villages. Those humans who reject the Oankali are left sterilized, but those humans who accept the Oankali trade have the sterilization process reversed so that they can start having hybrid children with their Oankali partners. However, the process of reproduction is not at all similar to the one humans were used to since there is no direct contact between a man and a woman, and the ooloi is the one in charge of making the reproductive cells work together: "The ooloi will make changes in your reproductive cells before conception and they'll control conception" (*LB* 42). The ooloi monitor that there is no genetic problem in the trade and they also choose the genes so that the hybrid children will have the best features of the two species eliminating hierarchical thought.

At first some humans find difficult the idea of having a third element in the process of procreation since most of them consider it a rather private moment. In some cases, and because of the phallic shape of the tentacles the ooloi have, some human males think their masculinity is taken from them by adopting a passive position during the sexual intercourse. Besides, as a result of this kind of sexual intercourse, men and women do not feel like having sex any more if it is not with the ooloi between them, what destabilizes our assumed ideas about sex and personal relationships. This physical repulsion men and women feel for each other once the ooloi has played its part is because of the chemical substances it alters during sexual contact. For Goss and Riquelme, this strange and inter-species *ménage à trois*, is especially interesting because it envisions new forms of relationships in which dualism no longer exists, thus questioning gender (444). In this type of intercourse both men and women adopt a passive position whereas the ooloi is the one who connects their bodies and manipulates the neurological system in order to feel pleasure. Therefore, we do not have the

traditional male/female opposition but something much more complex that destabilizes gender roles in sexual intercourse.

The result of the genetic trade between the Oankali and humans is made real with Lilith's first construct child. These hybrid children represent the future of humanity, even though their genetic material is half human and half Oankali, because they possess the best qualities of the two species. In *The Science Fiction Handbook* M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas comment that these biotechnological processes "may hold the key to bringing humanity into a new posthuman era in which we can intervene in the process of evolution and correct some of the natural flaws that have plagued us throughout history" (277). A different perspective on the result of the genetic trade is that of Sherryl Vint, who states that the focus is not on how the process is accomplished or on the specific and complex details of the manipulation, but rather "on the more abstract questions of how humans construct and value bodies" (58). Then, Butler's discourse shows us the possibilities of genetic engineering regarding cancer, reproduction and the healing of certain diseases; but it also warns us about the misuse of genetic engineering. For example, in the conversation between Lilith and the first man she is allowed to talk to, Butler questions the value of human life when cloning is involved. If cloning is such an easy procedure for the Oankali, then human life becomes valueless and human subjects interchangeable. However, human cloning does not take place in the novel, what makes us wonder if the Oankali themselves find it somehow troublesome even for them. With *LB* Butler was perhaps anticipating the implications of genetic engineering, but she does not consider in detail the issue of human cloning.

Genetic engineering is also one of the main issues in Joan Slonczewski's *ADIO.* As in the case of the Oankali, Sharers use genetic engineering as part of their everyday life so that it permeates their reproduction, their food habits and the way they relate with the other creatures of Shora. Whereas the Oankali are anatomically prepared to practice genetic engineering through their sensory arms, Sharers' experiments are carried out in special rooms in their houses, always using organic materials. Although Slonczewski does not give enough details to know how Sharers practice genetic engineering, we are aware that it is part of their life since genetic data are stored in the cells that make up their house-rafts as well as in the clickflies that travel around Shora.[20]

[20] Clickflies are small insects that travel around Shora. They store genetic information but they are also used to send messages from one raft to another.

In the case of Sharers, science and biochemistry are part of their very culture. Whenever Sharers make a scientific discovery, they inform other Sharers through clickflies or in the same gatherings they use to discuss decisions. Then, science can be described as a communal activity in which they share learning as if it were any other social issue (Donawerth 11). Another important aspect of Sharers' science is its presence in Sharers' life to the extent that genetic data and laboratories are part of the house-rafts. When Valans are told that Sharers are genetic engineers, they expect these women to have impressive and developed laboratories to carry out their experiments. But Valan scientists are surprised to find that the laboratories Sharers use do not look like theirs at all and for this reason they undervalue the women at first. Instead of having the typical infrastructure of a laboratory, Sharers use living structures like vines to store and implement their experiments:

> There's work space, there's plumbing. No glassware, bottled chemicals, or autoclaves, much less recognizable analytic hardware. But those vines you saw, they form galls whose cavities can be inoculated with pure cultures of microorganisms. Other vines are specialized secretors for enzymes, organic reagents, acids, you name it. (*ADIO* 215)

Some Valan scientists start working with those Sharers that work as lifeshapers and discover the huge amount of data that Sharers store in the vines of their rafts.[21] In fact, they realize that Sharers' scientific knowledge is far greater than their own, which creates some anxiety among Valans. For this reason, and for the natural resources Shora has to offer, Valans suddenly have the need to control Sharers' potential: "I told you how those 'clickflies' store more information by the genetic code than does the data bank of Palace Iridium. I told you how Sharer 'lifeshapers' regenerate mangled limbs and construct new living species to order, and you told me I was fooled by witchcraft" (*ADIO* 89).

Even though Sharers have a really powerful science, they are aware of the responsibilities that such a power entails. When Valans realize this power, they are afraid of what Sharers are able to do, so they decide to monitor them and even to torture some of them to get more information. Although at some point some Sharers think of responding to Valans' threats sending them a plague of some type, eventually they do nothing because that would harm the balance of Shora and thus challenge the lifestyle they defend with passive ressitance. Sharers understand that the power they have has to be controlled and for this reason they prefer to suffer pests or the attacks of certain dangerous animals rather than sending a plague against them: "'So why not spray the raft with something to clear out the pests?''Then seasilk

[21] Among Sharers, lifeshapers are those who decide to devote their life to scientific experimentation. Lifeshapers experiment with pests and plagues by decomposing structures into their chemical components. They also behave like doctors since their scientific knowledge enables them to treat diseases and to even grow lost limbs. Lifeshaping is studied at home, and it usually taught by mothers to their daughters.

would choke the raft. And fingershells would go hungry, and tubeworms die of the poison; then fish and octopus would have nothing, and what would Sharers eat?'" (*ADIO* 60). Because Sharers are afraid of damaging the balance of the ecosystem of Shora, they reject using plagues even if their own lives are at risk

One of the interesting aspects of the vast scientific knowledge of Sharers is that traditionally women have not been associated with science. In Western patriarchal thought women were believed not to have enough intelligence to deal with abstract knowledge or to carry out experiments. Besides, in traditional SF the role of the scientist was performed by a male character, whereas female characters were portrayed as the scientist's prize, wife or daughter. In this novel, Slonczewski challenges these sexist assumptions by introducing the character of the "lifeshaper," an alien woman who happens to be an expert genetic engineer. One may say that Sharers have such a knowledge of biology and chemistry as a result of their closeness to nature, but it would be a very essentialist response. We cannot deny that Sharers know their ecosystem perfectly because they understand their dependence on it, but they have also intelligent minds that have been able to disentangle the mysteries of DNA and of the chemical composition of organic beings. Regarding this, Edrie Sobstyl comments that Sharers' science is the result of their relationship with the ecosystem of Shora, but it is also "thoroughly rational and empirical" and based on hard work and experimentation (147).

At first Valans describe Sharers' science as primitive because of their lack of instruments. This happens because Valans use their knowledge to judge others, considering what they know as the norm. Valan laboratories—from the description we get of one in the army headquearters on Shora—are much like human ones, that is, full of small, complex and expensive instruments, what reinforces the view of technology "as hard, often shiny, typically with switches, or dials and lights that flash" (Sobstyl 144). However, Sharer laboratories or lifeshaping rooms are characterized by the presence of different types of living organisms: "Above in the silkhouse, there was no demarcation between wall and ceiling, though in some places shelves curled like pockets among the vines. The pockets held objects of coral and shell, and a sort of clear plastic, and fibrous seed pods the size of his fist" (*ADIO* 92). Only when some of these scientists get in touch with Sharers in a more personal way and understand how they live and how they relate to the natural world, they are able to recognise their technology and to admit that it is far superior from their own. As Jane Donawerth notes, Sharers are able to "redesign bacteria and viruses for healing," and this enables them to regrow lost limbs, as well as to restore the balance of Shora when Valans create plagues against clickflies and against seaswallowers (12).

For Valans, technology is usually associated with mechanical things since they have an important production of robots or s*ervos*—some of them with such a human appearance that Merwen is not able to identify them as machines. So Valan technology is based on the manipulation of inorganic materials that they can modify for their own goals, as the creation of robots that make their lives easier and more comfortable. However, Sharers reject inorganic substances because they have never been alive and that is an idea that they somehow reject. Because of this different point of view of technology, their philosophy of life has made it possible for them to understand biochemistry to the extent of being able to "life-shape or regenerate human bodies, a skill that has only a much more limited, mechanical counterpart on the world of Valedon" (R. Roberts, "Post-Modernism"143). Besides, Sharers scientific knowledge is used for keeping the equilibrium of Shora through peace, thus opposing Valans and their use of technology for torture and weaponry (Lefanu 92).

Another interesting aspect of Sharers' science is their reproductive methods since all the members of the society are women. In the novel Slonczewski hints that in the past Shora was inhabited by both women and men but there is no information on the disappearance of men—as a contrast with other feminist utopias in which readers are told that men were eradicated in a war or because of an illness that only affected them. Throughout centuries of absence of males on Shora, Sharers' bodies have suffered some adaptations that make it impossible for them to have sexual penetration. For this reason, when a Valan attempts to rape Lystra, she becomes ill and starts vomitting. So, when Spinel decides to stay in Shora, he is aware that he will have to renounce to the traditional sexual intercourse between men and women. In other novels of the Elyseum cycle we discover that Lystra and Spinel had children with the Sharers' method. In her "Study Guide" Joan Slonczewski explains that Sharers reproduce by the "fusion of ova," a procedure which is implemented by lifeshapers like Usha. Slonczewski explains that the participation of the lifeshaper is completely essential since "eggs and sperm have different patterns of 'imprinting, chemical modification of the chromosomes. In order to combine two eggs, one of them would have to be entirely remodeled to provide the imprinting patterns of sperm" (Slonczewski, "Study" n.p.).

A last interesting aspect about the breeding habits of Sharers is that the number of children born is controlled since lifeshapers have to intervene in the process. As most of the activities in Shora, the conception of a new child is discussed in gatherings before reaching a final agreement. Sharers are quite concerned for their numbers since they believe that if the population grows their life would not be sustainable any more since they would need more resources and that would alter the ecosystem. For this reason, a couple has to ask for

permission of the whole society in order to start with the process with the help of a lifeshaper, a fact that Valans find surprising:

> Confused, Merwen shook her head. "¿Why should our numbers grow?" Every conception of a child was a decision for the Gathering. Even Usha had been allowed a second child only after she had adopted Flossa, an orphan from a swallowed raft. Shora had only so many souls to go around.
>
> Malachite said, "Human numbers always grow."
>
> "But nine hundred thousand are just enough for us. It's been enough, for ten thousand years." (Slonczewski, *ADIO* 158-9)

Because of their deep knowledge of the ecosystem they live in, Sharers realize that a larger population would be dangerous since they would eat more than they can produce. However, Valans do not seem to understand that progress does not depend on the population but on the balance between a population and the habitat they live in. This way, Slonczewski considers overpopulation as an environmental issue just as Peter Wenz highlights that historically "increases in human population strain ecosystems" (205). The control of population of Sharers is not only related to their concern with sustainability but also with their philosophy of life. They believe that only a certain number of souls can reincarnate, so they are given the consent to have children when someone dies. This can be seen at the end of the novel when the number of Sharers who sacrifice themselves is so large, that they state that many children will be needed to have the same population there was before the war.

As we have seen, genetic engineering plays an important role in these novels. Both authors present science not as an elitist knowledge, but as part of the everyday life of these aliens that work as genetic engineers. On the one hand, the Oankali are natural genetic experts able to carry out modifications with their own bodies because of their anatomical particularities. On the other hand, Sharers practice science as part of their culture and their knowledge of genetics and biochemistry is based on their close relationship with nature, what has derived in a deep understanding of their surroundings. As a result of their knowledge of genetics, biochemistry and how nature works, both the Oankali and Sharers are able to treat other creatures with respect understanding their role in the balance of an ecosystem.

One of the interesting aspects of these novels is that even if the authors present the potential of genetic engineering, they also take into account the danger it entails. In *Lilith's Brood* genetic engineering is presented as something positive and full of benefits. The Oankali are able to perform complex genetic modifications without negative consequences since any harm produced in the patient will be also felt in the alien's body. However, Octavia Butler—through Lilith's voice and thoughts—makes us aware of the conflict of genetic

manipulation when there is no informed consent. Even if it is done as a way to improve humans as a species, any alteration done to human bodies without consent implies ethical concerns that discomfort readers. The massive sterilization to which the Oankali subject humans is justified by the supposed genetic flaw that makes humans behave in a self-destructive way. But even if we believe what the Oankali say and what they do is because of a greater good, their behavior goes against one of the most precious values of humanity, free will. Human opinions are not taken into account and they are not allowed to conceive a child unless they accept the trade proposed by the Oankali. It is not until a hybrid child, Akin, understands the resisters' situation and asks for a new world for humans to live on their own, that the Oankali seem to accept the inevitable: humans need their free will even if that means their destruction. Therefore, Butler explores in this trilogy both the advantages and disadvantages of genetic engineering inviting readers to judge on their own, but making them aware of the ethical conflicts that may arise in a future when genetic engineering will be part of our lives.

Similarly, in *A Door into Ocean* Joan Slonczewski also deals with the risks of genetic engineering but focusing on how its misuse can affect, and even destroy, a whole ecosystem. In this novel we can see how Sharers have developed complex healing techniques because of their knowledge of biochemistry and of anatomy. However, the focus on genetics is placed on the creatures that inhabit Shora and how the alteration of their cycles can break the ecological balance of the planet. Valans are not afraid of using pests and plagues especially designed to attack certain species, but Sharers realize that those modifications can entail dangerous consequences for the stability of their world. It is surprising to realize that they perform genetic engineering only when necessary and always bearing in mind that the ecosystem cannot be altered.

But the genetic modifications and experiments of these novels also make readers feel uncomfortable because of the realization that humans are truly part of nature and not above it. The Oankali modify humans as we humans modify non-human animals nowadays, and this realization makes readers reflect on how humans are represented in the novel. Butler's aliens take humans from their assumed superior position and place them in the difficult situation of deciding on their own survival as a species. Novels about genetic engineering usually challenge the concept of humanity by presenting humans as an arrangement of DNA that can be manipulated and sometimes mixed with other DNA codes. This way, and as Stacy Alaimo posits, films (and novels) dealing with genetic engineering "both express and ward off the fear that genetic manipulation will diminish the differences between humans and nonhumans,

betraying how we, like other creatures, are an array of genes that can be reshuffled into disturbing configurations" (283). Butler's *LB* portrays humans as an animal species under the study of a superior civilization interested in humans because of their intelligence and some of their diseases. Besides, the gene trade places humans in the uncomfortable position of renouncing to their superiority by facing a civilization far more superior than them.

Also Sharer experiments help Valans understand that the differences between the two species are far less important than the similarities. Throughout the novel Sharers wonder if Valans are humans or not, at least from a psychological point of view, since they know that despite the physical differences between the two societies, they are compatible from a genetic point of view. For Valans, Sharers are more animals than humans, and it is common to find them referring to Sharers as catfish. However, when they realize that the microbes of Shora turn their skins as purple as those of Sharers and that Sharers are able to heal their bodies by making lost limbs grow once more, they realize that their superior position is challenged by Sharers' advanced scientific knowledge.

Regarding reproduction both novels challenge the binary opposition of male/female. Firstly, the Oankali have three different genders—male, female and ooloi—and sexual intercourse always takes place with the three members present. When humans and the Oankali start to create hybrid families, the ooloi is also the central figure in the sexual intercourse between men and woman to the extent that there is no physical contact between the two of them. In construct families children are born with the agreement of the five parents since all of their DNA will be present in the new born child. Reproduction is thus seen as a scientific process in which the ooloi selects the precise genes before making the female pregnant. Despite this apparent coldness, pregnancies and births are a communal experience in which all the members of the family play a role.

In *ADIO* Sharers also challenge our assumptions about reproduction because there is no male involved in the process of pregnancy. When a couple of Sharers wants to have a child they need to ask permission from the rest, and once the permission is granted the lifeshaper fuses their ova and implants the embryo in one of the members of the couple. As in the case of *LB*, the process of reproduction seems quite scientific and lacking emotion, but then birth and child rearing are important experiences in which the Sharer community takes part. Therefore, the two novels present alternative reproductive methods that imply a challenge to the dualism male/female. By recognizing families with five parents—being the parents from three different genders and two different species—and with same-sex parents, the two authors

normalize non-traditional representations of the family that are as effective as the heterosexual one. In both cases we see that reproduction is not casual but a process that takes place after an agreement, sometimes of the whole society. But despite this lack of emotional spontaneity, we can see that childbirth is considered an event as important for the family as for the whole society.

In both novels reproduction seems to be the key for the hope of the survival of humans. The construct children of *LB*—despite their mixed genes—are partly human, and Spinel and Lystra's desire to start a family shows that Valans may have hope if they are able to see that there is something wrong with their conceptual framework. Genetic engineering appears in the novel as the key to the future of humanity, although both authors refer at some point to the dangers of its misuse. In *Our Posthuman Future* Francis Fukuyama talks about how genetic engineering is the key to change human nature (72), but I would rather say that it is the key to change the nature of the *homo sapiens*. Through the characters of Merwen, Lystra or Spinel, and Liliths' hybrid children, we can see how the idea of human goes beyond that of the *homo sapiens* body, to embrace new hybrid bodies that represent the future of humanity. With these hybrid characters, Butler and Slonczewski challenge our assumptions on the idea of what it means to be human while erasing the boundaries between human/animal and human/alien. In so doing, these authors portray humanity as a changing entity whose borders are continually redefined, especially in this era of scientific progress.

5.4 GENDER

In feminist SF we usually find how the common tropes of the genre—such as the alien or the post-apocalyptic world—are used to explore gender conflicts while proposing alternatives to sexism. In many of these works, female characters are the ones that "stand as critics and correctors of their society" (Caldwell 60) after a catastrophe takes place as the result of male mismanagement. In novels like *LB*female protagonists reject the traditional and oppressive conceptual framework of the societies they belonged to in order to embrace a new lifestyle, thus becoming "philosophical and biological mothers of a new race" (Caldwell 60). These female characters usually struggle against the circumstances and against sexist prejudices, but the key aspect is their ability to adjust to the situation they have been forced to live. As Dorothy Allison points out in her article on Octavia Butler, these women have to adapt to the situation and live by their own standards in order to "survive to mother the next generation—literally to make the next world" (472).

Butler's *LB* and Slonczewski's *ADIO* can be considered feminist SF works not only because of the relevance of their female protagonists but also because they deconstruct traditional gender conflicts. In the case of Butler, the three sexes that we can find among the Oankali represent a challenge to the dualistic concept of gender. In so doing, Butler forces readers to reflect on how gender determines the world we live in. Sloncewski's novel explores gender by presenting the struggles of a male to adapt to Sharers—a female society—and their lifestyle. Both writers make use of SF images like the alien, space travel and the alternative world, to explore how gender conditions human beings and what our reactions are when we are forced to adapt to new gender roles and to alternative reproductive methods. For this reason, this section will be devoted to study two main aspects: first, how each author portrays gender conflicts and what solutions she proposes; and, secondly, how female characters are represented.

Of the three parts that make up *LB*, perhaps the first one is the most interesting with regards to gender because its protagonist and narrator is a woman, Lilith. For her, it is surprising to learn about the three sexes of the Oankali because the idea challenges human male/female dualism. Lilith herself represents otherness in several ways because she is an African American woman whose species is no more than a minority when the Oankali rescue them from an apocalyptic Earth. The first contact with a human male after she is awakened turns into a violent episode in which she results hurt by a man that tries to rape her. This is an

example of the situations that have led Hoda M. Zaki to state that "Butler generally adheres to the notion that men are intrinsically more violent than women" (241). In fact, Zaki is quite critical of Butler's portrayal of men as more violent than women because he believes that this is "an essentialist view of human nature similar to that of some radical feminists" (241). However, I disagree with this view since throughout *LB* there are examples of both pacifist men and aggressive women. For example, when Lilith is searching for another human being, she hears some Oankali talking about Fukumoto, someone who had lived among the Oankali, preferring to stay in the spaceship rather than going to Earth. Although Lilith is told later that the man had died, readers are left with the idea that some human beings are able to accept the Oankali ways, being pacifism one of their main features. Lilith's partners Joseph and Tino, as well as Wray, who lives in the same village Lilith does, are some of the men that choose a pacifist life with their partners and children instead of resisting the Oankali and their trade. They are able to freely decide the lifestyle they prefer and they end up joining the aliens and their sustainable and healthy way of life.

In the other two parts of *LB*, we can see several episodes in which the humans who reject the Oankali, the so called resisters, behave in aggressive ways, both women and men. For example, we are told on different occasions that some resisters kidnap women and construct children to trade them for food, ammunition or women. In a world in which resisters have been massively sterilized, women and children, both apparently weak and inoffensive, have become objects to trade with. One interesting episode regarding resisters takes place when Akin meets two construct girls with tentacles in their hair. In order to be sold, there is a resister woman called Neci who insists on cutting the girls' tentacles so that they look more human, without understanding that the tentacles are not dead tissue but living limbs. Even Neci's husband is terrified with her attitude towards the girls: "'How many times, Neci,' the man said finally. 'How many times would you torture children? Would you torture them if they had come from your body? Will you torture them now because they did not?'" (*LB* 375). This episode shows why Zaki is wrong in assuming Butler is essentialist in her portrayal of men and women because we can see an aggressive woman who feels no empathy for the two children. This violent woman is even able to convince some men to help her to cut the girls' tentacles, even when she is told that the process would be extremely painful and dangerous, and that the tentacles would grow again. As a contrast to Neci we find Tate, who is shocked when she learns from Akin about Neci's intentions. An example of how some men are not violent at all is Wray, who accepts the trade after having been awakened by Lilith. Wray and his human partner live in the same village as Lilith and he is the one who shows Tino—

Lilith's second partner—how humans live in trade villages. Therefore, Butler is no essentialist in assuming that men are more violent than women, since she shows examples of how both men and women can behave in aggressive ways when they are under a stressful situation.

Gender conflicts are also explored in the novel presenting the differences between resisters and humans in trade villages. Whereas some resisters treat women as objects to trade with, other resisters treat women on equal terms to them. This may be due to the fact that the massive sterilization has somehow erased gender differences and placed women at the same level as men because of their inability to have children. This way, both men and women work in the factories they have built while trying to return to the lifestyle they had before the war. In trade villages men and women live peacefully enjoying an equal status. Both men and women take care of the land and of the construct children, thus distributing tasks without taking into account gender. Besides, since the villages are made up of organic materials, no special strength is needed for building structures, so both men and women are able to build it.

The choice of Lilith as the only person to be in charge of training the first group of humans who will travel to the Earth may be surprising if we consider that other humans will probably see her as the *other* since she is an African American woman. In fact, even some of the Oankali are not completely sure about the decision at first: "I didn't want to accept you, Lilith. Not for Nikanj or for the work you'll do. I believed that because of the way human genetics were expressed in culture, a human male should be chosen to parent the first group, I think now that I was wrong" (*LB* 111). When the Oankali talk about "the way human genetics were expressed in culture," they refer to how the condition of being a non-white woman may place Lilith in a difficult position in human society, since xenophobia, racism and sexism remain social problems to be solved. However, the Oankali recognize the choice was the correct one, perhaps because Lilith's otherness empowers her in a situation in which humans as a species have become the minority, the *other*.

Although the Oankali are able to notice the problem of sexism within certain human groups, they do not truly understand the idea because of the particular evolution of sexual identities among them. When an Oankali is born, it is what they call *eka*, a child without sex. Only when they go through metamorphosis, the Oankali unconsciously chooses a sex: male, female or ooloi. The choice of sex is related to the family situation since the affinity with the samesex parent is essential for the development of a particular sex, and the influence of siblings usually makes one child become male and the other one a female. In the case of the *ooloi*, they have to go through a second metamorphosis that will enable them to perform all the genetic tasks they are able to do as adults. Therefore, since they have no sex until they

reach a certain age, the Oankali make no gender distinction in the education of their children, rejecting all the social constraints and limitations that certain human females may suffer in the strictest patriarchal societies.

As human beings, readers may find it difficult to imagine a society with three different sexes; in fact, some humans reject the change in the sexual paradigm that a third sex implies: "There were still some Humans who insisted on seeing the ooloi as some kind of male-female combination, but the ooloi were no such thing. They were themselves—a different sex altogether" (*LB* 524). When some humans hear about the ooloi, they try to place it within a pre-established sex category, but they fail because, as Jeffrey A. Tucker states: "The ooloi are *a* sex as opposed to no sex or both sexes; therefore, they do not represent an obliviousness to or transcendence of gender categories so much as a reinscription and revision of them" (176). Other authors also comment on how Butler challenges gender assumptions by including a third element in the male-female binary, thus destabilizing the way we conceive gender categories. Goss and Riquelme comment that the hybridity the Oankali crave for is represented within their very nature by the "insertion of a third term into a duality" (444). Similarly, for Patricia Melzer, by introducing a third sex/gender, Butler undermines "our understanding of gender by troubling the dichotomy of sexual difference" (235). Melzer's statement implies that we humans have usually assigned a gender role to each sex in the duality, but by introducing a third sex in this dichotomy, gender roles have to be redefined.

However, other critics are not so completely sure about the sexual identity of the ooloi. Traditionally, in patriarchal societies male members have been the ones occupying the positions of power both in public and in private spheres. Then, males were considered the head of the family whereas women were usually subjugated to a secondary and passive position. In the case of the Oankali, there is no clear sex until they go through a metamorphosis and even then, males and females seem to develop similar tasks in their society, except that of giving birth. In fact, female Oankali are bigger in size than their male counterparts, something that also challenges humans since usually men are bigger and stronger than women—following the pattern of some non-human animals. But even if male and female Oankali occupy a similar status in their society, the ooloi does not. For Kristina Busse, despite Butler's efforts of making readers see the ooloi as a third gender, the ooloi occupies in fact a male power position because its role is that of the head of an Oankali family (10). Male and female Oankali are unable to procreate without the help of the ooloi, the one who, through its sensory arms, connects both bodies and selects the genetic material to form a zygote. Besides, from a more physical point of view, the ooloi is the one who uses its limbs to

connect with others' bodies, occupying the male position in reproduction as the one whose limb penetrates. As a result of this particular form of intercourse, many men in the novel feel sexually disempowered, as we can see in the words of one of the men who reject the Oankali when he states: "His manhood was taken away" (*LB* 192). Nevertheless, the interesting aspect of gender relations among the Oankali is that even if male, female and ooloi have different roles, their anatomical and functional differences are not used to sanction any kind of oppressive behavior. Whereas some human civilizations have argued that women's biological particularities place them in a subjugated position, the Oankali encourage the differences among sexes without using them to justify domination. So, although the ooloi sometimes behave as heads of the family, males and females are not relegated to a passive position, but they rather take part in all the family decisions.

As a result of the Oankali trade and of the idea of a society with three different sexes, not only gender roles are challenged, but also "alternatives to the nuclear family" are examined (Bonner 58). A human that accepts the trade does not only accept the otherness of the Oankali, but also the otherness of his/her own children. Construct families represent hybridity since they are made up of five different members: a female Oankali, a male Oankali, an ooloi, a female human and a male human. In the case of the two Oankali members, they are usually brother and sister, whereas the ooloi comes from a different family. For humans, it may be difficult to accept this idea since genetically it is wrong for two close members of the same family to have children because of the genetic problems that may appear. However, in the trade with the Oankali, these possible genetic diseases are corrected by the ooloi, so biologically it is not a problem. From a different point of view, humans may still consider this new concept of the family troublesome. The idea of brother and sister having sexual intercourse remains quite disturbing, but the Oankali understand sex as neuronal stimulation, so it is the ooloi with its sensory arms the one who stimulates others' bodies by segregating certain chemical substances without having any other contact. Therefore, considering that any construct child has five parents, Butler challenges the "triangular structure" of the traditional family while also offering "different modes of interaction among the parents and between parent and child" (Busse 11). By offering such an alternative family model, Butler implies that children may be raised in different ways without affecting the normal development of the child, an idea that may have originated from her own experience as a fatherless girl for most of her life, with a mother and a grandmother taking care of her.

There is another important consequence of the intromission of the Oankali regarding sexual intercourse. It was briefly mentioned before that sexual stimulation did not come from

touching each other but from tampering with the nervous system and with chemical substances. When Lilith is told that humans will have to give up touching each other, she complains that "It could not possibly work for human beings" (*LB* 220). The problem is that once an ooloi interacts with a couple, it segregates a substance that makes male and female feel the other somehow repellent: "But once they mated through an ooloi, they could not mate with each other in the Human way—could not even stroke and handle with each other in the Human way" (*LB* 305). This is another way in which Butler defies our way of thinking of sexual relationships, by presenting a new type of intercourse in which both men and women adopt passive positions whereas the ooloi assumes the traditional male role of using an external limb to connect with others' bodies. For critic Dorothy Allison, this new understanding of sex and sexual intercourse is the answer Butler proposes to the issue of sexual violence: "not abstinence or enforced celibacy, but a redefinition of sex and a rapprochement between the genders" (477).

Going back to the redefinition of the concept of family after the Oankali trade, Butler offers a new idea that may seem a bit controversial. On the one hand Butler presents families as the most important structure in the Oankali society. When a new child is born, all the members of the family have to be present so that the new baby realizes the safe and loving atmosphere of the family it is born into. Families are seen as a network "all interconnected, all united" (*LB* 332). For instance, when there is some absence during the birth, the ooloi uses the genetic material stored so that the baby can also feel the presence of the absent member: "Missing parents had to be simulated by the ooloi" (*LB* 331).[22] On the other hand, despite the importance of all the family members, construct males usually remain independent:

> I knew Humans did such things: marry here and mate there and there and there…. There was nothing in Human biology to prevent this. In fact, Human biology encouraged male Humans to have liaisons with more than one female. The male's investment of time and energy in fathering children was much smaller than the female's. Still, the concept felt alien to me. To have a mating and somehow put it aside. But then, most construct males never had true mates. They went wherever they found welcome and everyone knew it. There was no permanent bonding, no betrayal, no biological wrongness to contend with. (*LB* 700)

These words come from Jodahs, one of Lilith's children and the first ooloi born to a female human. His arguments, even if they sound essentialist, are biologically true. Because of their biology, male humans are able to use their sperm in more than one woman, since once the conception takes place, males do not have any other biological responsibility. However, female humans have to complete the process of pregnancy, birth and lactation without being

[22] This idea of simulation implies that the ooloi use their sensory organs to make the child aware of its missing parents or siblings, offering a kind of genetic photograph of the absent family member.

able to get pregnant again for several months. Therefore, whereas men are able to make several women pregnant in a short period of time, women are biologically constrained.

Although at first we may find this argument too essentialist, I do not believe Butler is stating that women have less freedom because of their ability to give birth. When Lilith is informed of the type of family that will result of the gene trade with the Oankali, she is told that "a complete construct family will be a female, an ooloi, and children. Males will come and go as they wish and as they find welcome" (*LB* 260). This description of construct families does not always correspond with what happens in the books, since some males decide to stay with their families even after the birth, as in the case of Tino and Lilith. Besides, males are not completely necessary for the species to survive since the ooloi are able to store genetic material for long periods of time. For example, Nikanj makes Lilith pregnant with Joseph's sperm even decades after he is killed. Therefore, males may be able to move and to breed freely. In this new concept of the family, the ooloi plays the role of the head of the family while females are more valuable than males. This way Butler shows that the capacity of giving birth does not limit or constrain women, but that it empowers them. The author challenges the idea of motherhood as a limitation and she places on women the role of creating a new species which represents the survival of at least a part of what it means to be human. Somehow this social structure seems to echo patriarchy in the idea of valuing a sex/gender over the other. However, in this alternative society Butler describes, no individual is discriminated on the grounds of sex and those construct males that decide to stay with their families and not to wonder can do it and play an important role in the care of the children.

Butler's novels usually focus on female characters that have to adapt to the circumstances they are forced to live in, which are usually difficult and harsh. In the case of Lilith we see how a woman becomes hated by most humans because she is thinking of the future instead of reminiscing nostalgically on a lost past. Her heroism lies in her ability to adapt rather than in resistance, and in the desire for a hybrid society in which her descendants will not be doomed to self-destruction because their genetic flaw will have been corrected. As Dorothy Allison posits, Butler's heroines adjust to family life and try to make the life of their children better "even though this means sacrificing personal freedom" (471). Lilith is then a heroine but not in the traditional sense of resistance—in fact she does not become a resister and she is considered a traitor—, but because she realizes that the survival of part of what humanity is becomes much more important than resisting and losing it all.

Butler's choice of the name Lilith for the female protagonist of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy did not take place by chance. Cathy Peppers states that the name of Lilith comes

originally from a Sumero-Babylonian goddess, that later was included into the Judeo-Christian tradition as Adam's first wife. Michelle Osherow comments that the myth of Lilith comes from a rabbinic *midrash*, which is "a kind of literature devoted to biblical interpretation" (69). The *midrash* in which Lilith appears is attributed to Ben Sira and it was written between AD 700 and 1000 (Castiello 234). According to Osherow, Lilith's myth stems from the attempts to explain the differences "between Genesis Chapter One, in which we are told: "And God created the human species in his own image... male and female he created them" (v. 27), and Genesis chapter two, which recounts Eve's creation out of a rib from Adam's side (v. 21)" (69). In this text, known as the Alphabet of Ben Sira, Lilith is described as Adam's first wife, who rejects to lie below Adam because she says they both come from the same earth, and finally flees from Eden (Osherow 70). Legend says that after her escape from Eden, Lilith joined Satan and became a demon that gave birth to evil creatures (Osherow 70; Castiello 234; Peppers n.p.). This last description suits Butler's Lilith perfectly since her relationship with the Oankali—who may be considered monsters or even demons—results in an offspring that cannot be called completely human.

But even those who have never read the Alphabet of Ben Sira or the Old Testament in Hebrew may find the name Lilith familiar because, as Michelle Osherow explains, Lilith is an archetype in Western culture that stands as "the original femme fatale, the insatiable seductress. Lilith, the first woman, the first Bad Girl" (Osherow 71). The myth of Lilith was refashioned by feminists, and in particular Jewish feminists, as a symbol of the power of femininity, especially in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s (Castiello 235; Osherow 71). Since Lilith represented the independent woman who frees herself from the constraints of patriarchy by rejecting her subjugation as a passive creature, feminists turned her into a symbol in their fight for equal rights as a figure of "independence and courage," (Osherow 71). Similarly, and because Lilith was described as the monster, several SF women writers decided to re-write her myth empowering her figure. In a genre in which women had often been depicted as "the alien other," Lilith was the perfect candidate as a protagonist since, as Michelle Osherow posits: "she's immortal, powerful, strong, feared, sexual, and midrash even tells us she can fly" (71).

For example, the 1952 story "The Starmen," written by Leigh Brackett portrays an evil female alien as "no more human than Lilith" (qtd. in Osherow 72). In her article "The Dawn of a New Lilith: Revisionary Mythmaking in Women's Science Fiction," Michelle Osherow focuses on two different representations of the figure of Lilith in SF written by women: the one in C.L. Moore's "Fruit of Knowledge" and the Lilith portrayed by Octavia E. Butler in

Dawn, the first novel of the trilogy. C.L. Moore's Lilith first appeared in 1940, and she is portrayed as the first female whose existence even precedes that of Adam's. C.L. Moore uses as a basis the Judeo-Christian myth but she introduces some changes. Lilith is not as independent as she appears in Genesis, since she is jealous of Eve and that is why she decides to take revenge (Osherow 72). However, according to Osherow, Butler's Lilith resembles more the Lilith portrayed in the Alphabet of Ben Sira in the sense that "she resists tyranny, is independent, bold, and curious" (75). In fact, there are several similarities between the Biblical Lilith and Lilith Iyapo. For example, both are almost raped by the first human male they encounter, and both become mothers of creatures that others consider monsters or devils (Osherow 75). However, the main difference Osherow highlights is that Butler's Lilith also resembles the Biblical Eve in the sense that both represent motherhood by taking care of their children, being Eve's and Lilith's children the first ones of a new race (76). Therefore, in this article Osherow explores how C.L. Moore and Octavia Butler revise the myth of Lilith by creating two characters that do not only threaten male characters but who also become heroines "belying the stereotypes that typically restrict female characters" (68). These Liliths represent a new feminine image that reflects "a diversification of women's roles in contemporary culture" (Osherow 68); they "[depict] an era of women who are ambitious yet humane, independent yet social, and by and large, splendidly complex" (81).

However, even if Butler's Lilith may be interpreted as a powerful heroine able to sacrifice herself, most of the humans who reject the Oankali trade blame her for their situation, referring to her as a betrayer and sometimes even as a demon—just like the Biblical Lilith: "So now and then when we get ex-resisters traveling through Lo and they hear my name, they assume I have horns, Some of the younger ones have been taught to blame me for everything – as though I were a second Satan or Satan's wife or some such idiocy. Now and then one of them still try to kill me" (*LB* 297). This way resisters have created their own legends about Lilith, making up a story that is analogous to that of the "traditional Biblical icon of the evil mother" (Peppers n.p.). Lilith's process of demonization—or alienization—starts when the Oankali modify her body so that she becomes faster and stronger. The Oankali make all these changes to help her survive when she starts awakening humans, maybe as an attempt to make her more similar to Oankali females: larger and stronger than males (Goss and Riquelme 445). These changes make other humans fear her because they cannot label her as a female human anymore. Besides, because she accepts the Oankali trade, and what it sexually implies, humans see her as "the stereotype of the lustful, promiscuous and deceptive seducer" (Castiello 236).

Lilith is a character that neither the other humans of the novels, nor readers can easily categorize. Humans consider her a demon, but they never give her the opportunity to explain the reason why she accepts the Oankali; they simply judge her for the otherness resulting from the genetic manipulation to which she is subjected. But readers also find it difficult to position Lilith since, as Rebecca Holden comments, her choice is no "no straightforward acceptance or denial of the Oankali and the cyborg world or the human resisters and humanity" (53). Lilith trains humans so that they are able to survive on Earth, but she does so not only because she has been told to by the Oankali, but because she wants to teach them to survive on their own if they want to escape once they travel to the planet. Restituta Castiello also comments on how difficult it is to classify Lilith since we can consider her "neither a mother goddess or a convincing demon, neither a collaborator nor a resister" (237). There is an interesting moment in the second novel of the trilogy when Tino observes Lilith while she is breast feeding Akin. He thinks that the name of Lilith is "loaded with bad connotations" (*LB* 285), but he also sees her as "A mother. Very much a mother. And something else" (*LB* 286). With these words Tino may be referring to Lilith's sexuality, to which he feels deeply attracted, but he may also be considering Lilith as the mother of a new race that represents the posthuman future of the *homo sapiens.* Castiello explains that it is precisely Lilith's defying nature, as well as her otherness as an African American woman, what makes her a valuable representation of "the 'otherness (or 'alienness') of monstrosity," thus becoming the key "to disclose the power of oppressive discourses wherever they are" (237-38).

Therefore, Butler's choice of the name of Lilith is quite meaningful if we consider its connotations. Both Butler's Lilith and the Biblical Lilith reject a passive role thus becoming controversial figures. Whereas the Biblical Lilith becomes some sort of demon giving birth to monsters, Butler's Lilith is seen as a traitor when she chooses to have hybrid children with the Oankali. But even if Butler's Lilith works together with the Oankali, she tries to give a chance to those humans who reject the aliens by training them how to survive on Earth. Besides, the importance of Lilith's decision to become the mother of a new species is reflected on the very title of the novel: *Lilith's Brood.* This title encompasses the protagonists of the different parts of the novel, that is, Lilith and two of her children—Akin and Jodahs. One interesting aspect of the title is precisely the choice of the word brood instead of children. The choice of brood implies the hybrid status of Lilith's offspring and how Butler's focus is placed on them and in their role in the story. Even if some readers may think of Lilith as a weak figure that prefers to accept the Oankali rather than fight back, her choice certainly entails bravery because she realizes that it is the only choice if humans want to survive, at least partially.

As we can see, *Lilith's Brood* is a complex novel in its representation of gender. The three different sexes that we can find among the Oankali represent both otherness and a possible way of solving gender conflicts. Although the ooloi clearly function as heads of the family, this position does not entail the subjugation of the other two sexes. Since the Oankali have no sex until they go through a process of metamorphosis, sex is not ascribed to a particular gender role, eliminating this way the dualisms we can find in human society. For this reason, when some human males are told to adopt a passive position during sexual intercourse, they feel their manhood is taken away because they relate the male sex with the male gender role of power that men have held in patriarchal societies for millennia. With the inclusion of the ooloi as the third element in what used to be a duality, Butler challenges human norms. Besides, and thanks to the power of cancer cells for the Oankali, the ooloi are able to change their appearance depending on its partners so that it undermines "stable sexual identities through their unstable bodies, while at times insisting on identities that exist outside of social construction" (Melzer 224). By breaking the binary opposition of male/ female, Butler shows that sex or gender cannot be used to justify subjugation. As an alternative to the arrangement of our society according to gender, Butler proposes the trade villages as places in which both male and females share all the tasks equally except that of giving birth, although even in the process of giving birth males have an essential role in creating the atmosphere that welcomes the new born.

One of the main discriminations that Butler tries to erase in her novel is that based on gender. Although we can find resisters who kidnap and rape women until they die, most women in the novel develop important roles. For Patricia Melzer, Octavia Butler's fiction "can be understood as part of a feminist tradition in science fiction literature" because it focuses on the experiences of female characters (43). Lilith, the protagonist of the first novel, and mother of the protagonists of the two other novels represents the fight against discrimination from her triply alienated position as an African American female member of a species in extinction. But we can also find other female characters who reject the Oankali and who try to survive in a difficult atmosphere. For example, we can see how Tate explains to Akin humans' fears and concerns, something decisive for his decision of asking for a planet where humans can live on their own. Butler's female characters "challenge traditional representations" (Helford 260) of women in SF because she uses brave women who make large sacrifices so that humanity survives, even if only partially. Besides, these same characters encourage a new concept of family in which gender roles are redefined. In the

hybrid future Butler envisions, the family is empowered and becomes the basis of the society that represents the future of two different species.

Joan Slonczewski's work is also concerned with gender issues, and especially the novel *A Door into Ocean.* The most interesting aspect of this novel regarding gender is that Slonczewski, as other feminist SF writers before her, decides to place most of her novel in a female world with almost no male inhabitants. As was commented in the section of this dissertation devoted to feminist utopias, most feminist utopias describe the intromission of men as something negative and even dangerous. In the case of *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman we see how men are imprisoned and when freed, they find it difficult to live with women who are not used to obeying men. The women of *Herland* do not behave like the women of the time when the novel was published, and they reject the role of wives/mothers that the male protagonists want to impose on them. Another interesting text that portrays the clash of two different cultures is James Tiptree, Jr.'s novella "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976). In this text the male astronauts that go back to Earth discover that a catastrophe has left only women on Earth. Although the astronauts react in different ways to this news, the clash is too strong and the women who inhabit the Earth are not able to incorporate males to their society so they decide to exterminate them (Barr, *Alien* 11).

The main problem with single-sexed worlds is that they fail to portray the nature of gender conflicts. However, Joan Slonczewski's society of Sharers in the planet Shora moves beyond the constraints of its predecessor utopias in the sense that it covers more accurately gender conflicts. For Stone-Blackburn, in feminist utopias we can truly see how women would develop their potential if they were not constrained by being the *other* to men, and thus subjugated to patriarchal institutions (n.p.). Besides, in this type if texts we can also see the violence that is usually associated with males is either absent or at least reduced; and regarding this fact, Stone-Blackburn points out that the question that feminist utopias usually "raise and leave unanswered is whether male violence can be eliminated without eliminating men" (n.p.). In this sense, Slonczewski's feminist utopia is quite interesting and challenging since the most violent acts are usually undertaken by female characters. For example, we can see how Jade, second in command to Realgar, does not hesitate to use physical and psychological forms of torture that verge of sadism. Berenice, also called Nisi the Deceiver, is another female character who behaves in a violent way when she puts a bomb in the Valan military base. However, Spinel, who is a Valan male, accepts the Sharer agreement of not attacking Valans in spite of the women's scientific superiority. Therefore, Slonczewski does

not hint that men are more inclined to have violent behaviors because she portrays female characters that are more dangerous than their male counterparts. With these characters Slonczewski shows that violence has more to do with the values of a society than with the gender of its members.

There is another interesting way in which Slonczewski plays with gender roles inverting the assumptions of previous feminist utopias. In many feminist utopias we usually find female societies that are less scientifically and technologically advanced than those of the males who appear in their world. In these cases, and as Robin Roberts posits, "the stereotypical male explorer uses his technological prowess and masculine charm to take over a planet" (*A New Species* 143). In her novel Slonczewski does something similar on the surface. Apparently, Sharers have no technological superiority if we compare them to the Valans with their vehicles, their weapons and their laboratories. However, progressively we discover that Sharers are scientifically much more advanced than Valans. In fact, the Valan soldiers on Shora start being afraid of Sharers' power to create a plague to wipe them out of of the planet, and some Valan scientists seem to be charmed by the possibilities of Sharers' science and biochemical discoveries. Therefore, we see how Slonczewski inverts the usual image of the male explorer coming from a more advanced society, and instead portrays a female society with an advanced scientific research that is used in responsible ways.

Even though Sharers have a deeper knowledge of biology and chemistry, readers may be at first as skeptical as Valans, until we—at the same time as Valans—realize that Sharer's concept of scientific research differs from our own. Throughout history, and with few exceptions, science has always been a male issue, until recent decades. Scientific research is associated nowadays with overspecialized experts who work with complex artifacts in laboratories—and something similar can be said about Valan science from what we read in the novel. For this reason, when Valans look for Sharers' laboratories they are unable to find them. For Sharers, science is not a tool to control and manipulate nature but a means to understand how natural processes occur and which elements take part, so that science is part of their everyday life and their laboratories are just one more room at their house-rafts: "spaces for science (and for all occupations) are intertwined with living spaces" (Donawerth 11).

The planet Valedon belongs to a larger system known as the Patriarchy of Torr, and although at some points we may interpret this civilization as deeply patriarchal, it is not so. According to what Slonczewski narrates in the novel, women and men are usually considered equals, and both enjoy freedom. From the images of Nisi's life we can see that children are

raised in equality, and we can see this in the fact that both Realgar's daughter and son are taught how to hunt. Nisi herself is free to move around until the problem on Shora becomes really serious, when Realgar tells her to remain on Valedon for her own security. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that there are some negative portrayals of Valan women in the novel. Both Nisi and Jade are presented as powerful women—Nisi is the daughter of a wealthy merchant whereas Jade is an important army official. Even though their backgrounds are completely different, both end up behaving in such violent ways that they even shock their fellows: Nisi is rejected by Sharers while Realgar sometimes wonders if Jade's tortures go beyond the line. But in this negative portrayal of Valan women we may find two different interpretations. On the one hand, we may think that Nisi and Jade are punished because they had tried to hold positions of power, what in a patriarchal system is unacceptable. On the other hand, we may see Nisi's and Jade's falling in disgrace as punishment for their violent actions and their inhuman behavior. The second option seems more convincing since the problem of these two women does not lie in their position in society but on the wrongness of their actions.

In *ADIO*, there seems to be gender conflicts attached to social positions. We can see that Valan soldiers are both men and women without distinction, and that there is no great different among sexes if we consider the upper classes. However, if we have a look at the lower classes, we can see that the difference between gender roles is greater. Lower classes do not have enough money to buy servos to perform household tasks and other annoying jobs, and many of these tasks are part of women's duties as it happens in patriarchal societies. Besides, it seems that certain Valan laws place women in a powerless position, like the ones related to having a child out of marriage. For example, while Usha and Merwen are in Valedon at the beginning of the novel, a man approaches them and asks them to sterilize his daughter:

> "You must," he insisted, jostling the young woman from side to side. "I had her sent all the way from Hagoth Peak. She bore a child out of wedlock, so now her tubes must be tied. If I can't pay for it, they'll send her to the slave market. It's the law, witch woman."
> […]
> "Enough," he barked. "Worthless daughter, to bear a child without a father." (*ADIO* 21)

In these words we have a sexist example of the treatment of women. If a woman has a child without having a husband and then she—or her family—cannot pay for her sterilization, she is forced by law to become a slave. However, we are not told what happens with the man that made her pregnant. This is an example of the objectification of woman and her degradation to the category of slave according to Valan law. But even if she is sterilized and saved from

slavery, the problem is that the process will be done without her consent, which is a threat to personal freedom to which wealthy people are not subjected. We do not know if laws are the same for all Valan citizens, but wealthy Valans are at least able to pay for the sterilization—or even to the authority so that the sterilization is avoided. As in many societies—whether real or imagined—money makes social differences and inequalities even larger, and women and children are usually the ones who pay the larger price.

Another particular aspect of the treatment of gender in this novel is how Slonczewski challenges the dualism male/female by placing males as the *other*. Since there are no men among Sharers, male Valans are seen as the *other*. Regarding the relationship of Sharers with male Valans we can find two different positions. On the one hand, some Sharers are so negative with males that they even think that "Only lesser races produce males" (*LB* 80). Also Lystra, for example, refers prejoratively to Spinel as a "malefreak"—although her hatred towards him is mostly based on his Valan origin rather than on his sex. On the other hand, most Sharers respect males as equals even if they see them as the *other*. For Merwen and Usha Spinel becomes a member of their family regardless of his condition of male. Even Lystra, who at first hates Spinel, ends up falling in love with him.

> "So what, I love you anyway." Lystra figured it was all right. Usha had said that males were not all that different, just bigger outside to make up for what they lacked within. For a moment she felt intensely sorry for Spinel, who had no womb for a little sister to swim in, only a thing like the mating arm of an octopus. (*LB* 144)

At first Lystra seems confused with her feelings because her previous lover had been another Sharer. However, she realizes that Spinel is one of her sisters despite his sex and origin: "Spinel was shockingly 'different' but as delicious as…as any other sister" (*LB* 219). Therefore, among Sharers difference and otherness does not imply inferiorization or oppression, but rather curiosity and the desire to find the similarities rather than differences—as when Merwen and Usha live among Valans in order to demonstrate they are as human as Sharers. An example of how males also have a place in Shora if they accept Sharers' lifestyle is the moment Spinel becomes a Sharer in his own right.

Sexual relationships among Sharers are also important when analyzing the issue of gender in the novel. Since Sharers are all women, there is no penetration in sexual intercourse only masturbation of the sexual partner. Therefore, sexual relationships are not linked with reproduction since Sharers can only become pregnant when a lifeshaper fuses their ova. When Spinel asks Lystra to have sexual relationships with penetration she explains to him that penetration would make her sick. However, Spinel insists and Lystra gets angry at his refusal to accept her for what she is. But when he goes back to Valedon and he tries to have sex with

a normal woman, he realizes that he preferred the type of sexual intercourse Lystra and he had, even if it did not imply penetration. His acceptance of sex without penetration is the acceptance of becoming the *other*, of rejecting the image of male as dominant and the passivity of the female. In the sexual moments with Lystra, both of them use their mouths, tongues and fingers to give each other pleasure in a position of equality.

As it has already been mentioned, reproduction among Sharers is the product of a biomedical process in which a lifeshaper fuses two ova to create a zygote that is later placed in the womb of one of the Sharers of the couple. This way, the population is controlled so that the number of Sharers does not represent a danger to the equilibrium of the ecosystem. Once a child is born she becomes part of her family but also part of Shora, becoming one more sister among many—both human and non-human. For this reason, if the seaswallowers season kill Sharers, their children go to another family and become part of it as any other daughter. Families play an important role in Shora since it is mothers who teach children how to hunt, how to make seasilk and—with some children—how to perform lifeshaping. Moreover, since Sharers refer to each other as 'sister' they imply that the relationship between them is more that of a family than that of neighbors. In fact, the gatherings that adult Sharers hold are a mixture of government and family meeting, since all of them enjoy the same status.

Although there are some similarities between *ADIO* and previous feminist utopias, there is an important difference that should be highlighted. Whereas many feminist utopias have no place for males—and those men that appear in these stories have a tragic end—*ADIO* offers the possibility of dialogue between sexes. In previous feminist utopias some women adopt a rather violent response towards male intromission, while Sharers are open to accept males if they accept Sharer's lifestyle. This openness is reflected in Spinel's experience and development, which shows that feminist utopias are more interesting if they portray the dialogue between genders. As Joan Slonczewski states in her "Study Guide" of the novel, in *ADIO*, women are nor portrayed as superior to men but as able to offer an alternative lifestyle that some characters choose—Spinel—and that some characters end up betraying—Nisi.

One last aspect to analyze in relation to the portrayal of gender in *ADIO* is that of essentialism. For Sara Lefanu, there is some danger in putting too much "emphasis on traditionally feminine values" since "this challenges science fictional norms" in the sense that masculine values have always the norm in the works of the genre (92). For Lefanu, the importance of feminine values over masculine ones may result in a SF with too much sentiment and thus "become ghettoized precisely as 'women's SF'" (Lefanu 92). In *ADIO* feminine values are emphasized over masculine ones, but this does not mean that science

fictional norms are challenged. The novel, as most of the works of the genre, portray the clash of two civilizations including robots, aliens, powerful machines and space travel, which makes the reader consider the novel as SF. Lefanu seems to criticize this work on the basis that Sharers' attitudes are portrayed as superior to Valans' and, as a consequence, that feminine values are regarded as superior to male ones. Even though feminine rituals and values play an important role in the novel, Sharers do not totally conform to the passive position that has characterized female characters in SF during most of the existence of the genre. For example, from a physical point of view, Sharers' bodies are portrayed as strong because of the number of hours they spend swimming. Besides, they are very able hunters and fighters when they face dangerous creatures. Although during the war on Shora Sharers do not fight and prefer to present a non-violent defensive position, their decision is not made on the grounds of their passiveness or weakness but rather because their very nature opposes any form of violence.

Finally, if we consider the intersection of gender and Sharer lifestyle, we notice that even though they place feminine values over male ones, not all the women in the novel choose Sharer lifestyle over Valan one. For example, the Valan officer Jade treats Sharers as animals and tortures them to death, instead of praising their stability and harmony of their community. Similarly, the Valan Nisi—who has spent most of her life among Sharers before becoming one—also fails to totally embrace Sharers' way of life when she decides to use a bomb to kill Valans. In contrast, Spinel, a male Valan, is able to feel at home in Shora at the end of the book. He starts living among Sharers when he is already a teenager, which makes the adaptation process more complicated. Although for a long time he is not sure about where his home is, he finally decides to stay on Shora, thus preferring their lifestyle to the Valan one. But apart from Spinel, other Valan males in the novel—most of them injured soldiers or scientists that observe their everyday routines—show their interest for Sharers rituals and habits. In fact, at the beginning of the novel Merwen admits that anyone who wishes to become a Sharer can be one, regardless of the sex: "It is true that Shora knew no men before traders came. But that does not prove that a man can't become a Sharer" (*ADIO* 23).

Both Octavia Butler and Joan Slonczeswki have made a relevant contribution to feminist SF in terms of gender. Their novels challenge patriarchal assumptions and gender oppression by deconstructing the dualism male/female and by portraying alternative societies without hierarchies. For example, Octavia Butler chooses as protagonist of the first novel of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy an African American woman whose survival depends on accepting

otherness, both in others and in her. Lilith's heroism lies in her capacity of adaptation and of sacrifice, even if that means to become an outcast and a traitor. But apart from the innovation of choosing an African American woman as the protagonist of a SF text, Butler also challenges gender assumptions by introducing a third sex in the Oankali. With the inclusion of the ooloi in the binary male/female, Butler destabilizes our concepts of sex and gender. Besides, she re-writes gender roles with the creation of an alien species whose members do not show any sex until they reach adulthood, and even then, the physical differences between male and female are minimal. With the portrayal of a society with sexless children that can become male, female or ooloi when reaching adulthood, Butler shows that other gender relations are possible and that dualistic thinking can be rejected in favor of healthier relationships between sexes and genders.

Slonczewski's work also invites the dialogue between genders through the character of Spinel, who becomes the bridge between two more or less opposing lifestyles. In *ADIO* the complexity lies in the lack/need of understanding among different peoples and between male and female. In her portrayal of a feminist utopia, Slonczewski does not fail to incorporate male concerns through Spinel's voice and thoughts during his process of adaptation to Sharers' way of life. The author presents a series of characters that have to struggle against prejudices and stereotypes, and that process makes them react in different ways to the invasion of Shora. On the one hand, Spinel, as a Valan male, is expected to adopt a more offensive and violent attitude towards the invasion; however, he struggles to establish some kind of understanding between Sharers and Valans. On the other hand, Nisi, who is already a full Sharer, is the one who decides to use bombs, killing some Valans. Thus, *ADIO* also challenges our expectations as readers, while it invites us to envision an alien way of life whose ability to resist and whose openness to dialogue makes it worthy of our attention.

In both novels family relationships play an important role since they represent the basis of the alternative conceptual framework Butler and Slonczewski present. The hybrid family portrayed in *LB* challenges the traditional familiar arrangement while representing the future of humanity. In Butler's Oankali-human families, the acceptance of otherness as part of the self—just like Lilith with her construct children—is the only way for humanity to survive. In the cases of Sharers, we can also conclude that families are the most important structure for their survival. Scientific knowledge and cultural values are transmitted from mother to daughter, so the family of Sharers involves more than kinship.

5.5 HUMAN VS ALIEN

As stated in the title of this dissertation, one of the main purposes of this work is to explore the duality human/alien as presented in feminist SF. The two novels analyzed in this dissertation portray alternative realities in which the clash between an alien civilization and a—more or less—human one makes us question the boundary between human and alien and how the *other* can become part of the self. So far, several themes that appear in the novels have been discussed, i.e., the environment, science, genetics, gender and reproduction, with special focus on how the two civilizations deal with them. The previous sections have served as a kind of background to the more important analyses that will follow: that of the dualism human/alien, and the exploration of both novels from an ecofeminist perspective. In this section, I will focus on how humans and aliens are portrayed in the novels, on how both humans and aliens react to otherness and on how the boundary between human and alien is continuously changing, as we already foresaw in section 5.1 with the analysis of the shifting narrative voices.

Throughout the trilogy Butler continually plays with the idea of who the alien is in the story. In the first part—*Dawn*—Lilith is the protagonist and narrator, but her position as one of the few humans among the Oankali places her as the alien, thus reversing the typical role of humans in SF works. Even though she describes the Oankali as an extraterrestrial civilization whose appearance is alien to us, she ends up realizing she is the *other*. During her stay in the Oankali spaceship, Lilith gets used to the Oankali lifestyle and even her body is genetically modified so that it is stronger and heals faster. These modifications 'alienize' her to the extent that when she lives with other humans they look at her with suspicion, they do not think she is completely human. In the second part of the trilogy it is Akin, Lilith's son, who narrates the story. Because of his human appearance most resisters treat Akin as they would treat any human child, even though his ability to speak and his strange tongue betray his hybrid nature. Akin's mixture of human and Oankali, and his uniqueness as the first construct male born to a human mother, make him able to understand the situation of humans as aliens in their own world, subjected to massive sterilization. From his position as a hybrid, Akin becomes the bridge between humans and the Oankali. He is an alien among resisters, but then among the Oankali—when he travels to the spaceship to talk about human concerns—he is also the alien because of his humanity. Finally, in the third part Butler also explores the idea of otherness by choosing Jodahs as the first person narrator. Jodahs, the first ooloi born to a human

mother, represents the last step in the human-Oankali trade because of its ability to change its appearance.

In the first part of the novel readers meet the Oankali through Lilith's eyes, what makes us see them as the alien:

> The lights brightened as she had supposed they would, and what had seemed to be a tall, slender man was still humanoid, but it had no nose–no bulge, no nostrils–just flat, gray skin. It was gray all over–pale gray skin, darker gray hair on its head. The hair grew down around its eyes and ears and at its throat. There was so much hair across the eyes that she wondered how the creature could see. The long, profuse ear hair seemed to grow out of the ears as well as around them. Above, it joined the eye hair, and below and behind, it joined the head hair. (*LB* 13)

At first, the dim lightling only allows Lilith to see the shape of the creature, without being able to appreciate more details of its features. When she asks the Oankali about its gender, he gives her an interesting answer: "'It's wrong to assume that I must be a sex you're familiar with,' it said, 'but as it happens, I'm male'" (*LB* 13). After this statement, both Lilith and the narrator stop referring to him as "it," since Lilith feels able to label him as male regardless of his species. From my point of view, this change of pronoun implies Lilith's need of normalizing and accommodating her situation and one way to do so is by thinking of this Oankali as a male rather than as a creature she cannot fix into any of the categories she knows.

Analyzing Lilith's first reactions to the appearance of Jdahya, Jenny Wolmark comments that Lilith first thinks of Jdahya as male because "her response is determined by a patriarchal frame of reference within which masculinity is unambiguously equated with power" (*Aliens* 31). Therefore, Lilith instantly associates the figure of Jdahya with masculinity because since she thinks he is in charge of her imprisonment; her conceptual framework leads her to associate his position of power with masculinity. However, and as Wolmark posits, a little bit later when Lilith is allowed to see Jdahya completely, she refers to him as "Medusa" because of the numerous tentacles that cover the body of the Oankali, thus erasing part of that masculinity (*Aliens* 31).

What Lilith had first considered hair was actually a network of tentacles that cover the Oankali body, and she finds it so strange that she tries to escape from him. When she looks at him his appearance makes her think about the myth of Medusa, describing his "hair" as "a nest of snakes startled, driven in all directions" (*LB* 13). Although she feels revulsion towards Jdahya's alienness, he tries to explain to her his anatomical differences so that she understands that there is nothing to be afraid of:

> "They're not separate animals," he said. "They're sensory organs. They're no more dangerous than your nose or eyes. It's natural for them to move in response to my wishes or emotions or

> to outside stimuli. We have them on our bodies as well. We need them in the same way you need your ears, nose, and eyes."(*LB* 13-14)

Little by little Lilith accepts Jdahya's explanation about the sensory organs, realizing that they are organs different to human ones. However, it takes some time before Lilith completely accepts the otherness of the Oankali since she is unable to classify him according to human standards: "She did not want to be any closer to him. She had not known what held her back before. Now she was certain it was his alienness, his difference, his literal unearthliness" (*LB* 13). But Lilith's most interesting reaction towards the Oankali takes place when she meets Kahguyaht, Jdahya's ooloi:

> It was almost exactly Lilith's size—slightly larger than Jdahya and considerably smaller than the female Tediin. And it had four arms. Or two arms and two arm-sized tentacles. The big tentacles, gray and rough, reminded her of elephant trunks – except that she could not recall ever being disgusted by the trunk of an elephant. […] Looking at Kahguyaht, she took pleasure in the knowledge that the Oankali themselves used the neuter pronoun in referring to the ooloi. Some things deserved to be called "it." (*LB* 49)

The appearance of the ooloi is different from that of the male and female Oankali because of the large sensory organs they need to perform genetic modifications, so its otherness is even greater than that of the Oankali males and females. When she met Jdahya, Lilith associated his tentacles to the myth of Medusa, but in this case she thinks of the two sensory organs as of disgusting elephant trunks, so we can see she tries to incorporate the Oankali otherness into her familiar world by animalizing the alien. But even among the Oankali, who consider themselves a non-hierarchal society, the ooloi play the most important roles because they are necessary for breeding and for complex genetic alterations. Maybe for this reason, as well as for their lack of gender, they are referred to with the pronoun "it", which reinforces their otherness. What is interesting in the ooloi otherness is that they are not inferior because of how different they are; instead, it is precisely their difference what places them as the heads of the family unit. Among the Oankali, the ooloi are respected and valued because of the complex processes they are able to perform; and it is precisely with her ooloi, Nikanj, with whom Lilith establishes the deepest relationship in the novel.

Lilith's reaction to the Oankali is just an example of how most humans react to the otherness of the alien civilization. Although Lilith's revulsion does not become violence, there are other humans that see in the otherness of the Oankali a threat to their humanity. In his article "'The Human Contradiction': Identity and/as Essence in Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis Trilogy," Jeffrey A. Tucker posits that "human propensity for hierarchical thinking" makes humans feel racism not only among themselves, but also towards "another

group, at a higher, species-oriented, taxonomic level" (170). Until the war that Butler describes in the novel, humans had been on the top of the hierarchy of the creatures on Earth. For this reason, once the Oankali displace humans from their priviledged position, humans develop a xenophobic—or even speciesist—attitude towards the alien creatures that have relegated them to the position of the *other*, thus challenging their alleged superiority.

The episode in which we can clearly appreciate this speciesism is at the end of the first part of the novel when Curt, one of the men awakened by Lilith, kills Lilith's partner Joseph and then runs away with a group of humans into the training forest of the spaceship. After discovering Joseph's corpse, Lilith goes into the forest accompanied by the ooloi assigned to the humans who have run away. When both groups meet, a fight takes place between humans and ooloi, resulting in several humans stung by the ooloi and temporarily drugged, and some aliens hurt. This is the only open fight that takes place in the novel and whereas the humans attack with axes and try to kill as many ooloi as possible, despite their inferior position, the ooloi do not want to use violence against humans so that they only sting humans to calm them down instead of killing them, which would be rather easy. This violent response of humans is explained by their fear of being subjected to an alien species, which reinforces the Oankali belief that humans are violent and that they use their intelligence to guide their hierarchical thought. In contrast, the Oankali prefer dialogue, and when they understand that humans reject them, they leave them on their own on Earth, though sterilized. Once on Earth, many humans continue showing a violent behavior towards each other, and kidnappings, rapes and murders are common. This increased tendency for violence is reinforced by the powerless position of humans, who have been displaced from the position of superiority, and whose survival is at stake if the sterilization is not reversed.

Considering all this, readers can easily understand how different humans and the Oankali are regarding violence. One of the reasons why Butler wrote this trilogy was that she could not accept that people believed that the development of nuclear warfare would result in a safer world. During the Cold War, the danger of a nuclear catastrophe was plausible, and for that reason Butler chose the aftermath of such an event for *LB*. Jeffrey Tucker explains that this trilogy was conceived in the pessimism that resulted from doubting if humanity would be able to cease "its habit of engaging in successive, self-perpetuating, 'simple one-upmanship', which threatens all life on the planet when thermonuclear warheads are involved" (181). In *The Science Fiction Handbook* M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas also comment that Butler's novel works as a kind of warning about the consequences of a nuclear war, especially taking into account the Reagan administration in the 1980s and its politics concerning nuclear

warfare (271). Therefore, the negative portrayal of humanity in the novels has to be understood within the historical context of the author and the events that were taking place at the time. In an interview Butler herself expressed that if people believed nuclear weapons would make the world safer, this meant that there was something wrong with us as a species. This belief is expressed in the novel as the genetic flaw the Oankali find in humans: that they are very intelligent creatures but that their intelligence only serves their hierarchical thinking instead of guiding it. Therefore, the contrast between the violent behavior of humans and the Oankali peaceful attitude is the reflection of Butler's belief that "human nature is fundamentally violent and therefore flawed" (Zaki 241).

Although the trilogy portrays human beings from a pessimistic perspective, by focusing on their violent and hierarchical behavior, Butler presents a bit of hope when Akin is allowed to establish a human colony on Mars. Throughout the novel, the number of examples in which humans behave in a violent way is abundant, which shows that Butler truly believed that violence was a problem. However, some other characters—Lilith, Joseph, Tino, Tate, among others—illustrate that there is still hope in human beings by choosing a healthier lifestyle than the pre-war one. Affected by the powerlessness of humans, Akin explains their concerns to other Oankali, who reluctantly allow resisters to start a new colony on Mars, where they will breed and start a new world. But, despite his insistence in helping humans, Akin admits that humans may fail again because it is in their nature. This pessimistic view appears once more at the beginning of the third part of the novel when Jodahs meets some humans headed for Mars and it tells them:

> Your own history tells you. Your people are intelligent, and that's good. The Oankali say you're potentially one of the most intelligent species they've found. But you're also hierarchical – you and your nearest animal relatives and your most distant animal ancestors. Intelligence is relatively new to life on Earth, but your hierarchical tendencies are ancient. The new was too often put at the service of the old. It will be again. You're bright enough to learn to live on your own world, but you're so hierarchical you'll destroy yourselves trying to dominate it and each other. You might last a long time, but in the end, you'll destroy yourselves. (*LB* 530-531)

Although these words come from a construct ooloi, we can see in them the pessimistic tone of Butler's disappointment in humanity. The interesting thing is that even if readers reject the idea of being genetically flawed, as resister humans do, we cannot forget the events that take place in the novel. Starting with a nuclear war, and considering the cases of murder and rape and other types of violence, and with the eventual destruction of some cities because of the development of weapons in the novel, we are easily inclined to accept that there is indeed something wrong with human beings. In fact, even Akin, who defends humans, realizes that

they tend to behave in a self-destructive way: "There always seemed to be reason for humans to kill each other" (*LB* 497).

In these novels Butler portrays the conflict that arises in the encounter with the *other*, whether we consider as *others* humans or the Oankali. But in so doing, she continually shifts the perspective of who the *other* is, and that problematizes the representation of both species. If at the beginning of the trilogy both Lilith and readers—presumably—see the Oankali as a frightening and oppressive species; later in the novel, and after having understood how the Oankali live, we can appreciate their positive attitudes. Patricia Melzer analyzes this evolution in the way we think about the Oankali by stating that "the antagonism the reader feels toward the Oankali is partly redeemed by the alien culture's values" (56). In her portrayal of the clash between the two civilizations, Butler sometimes presents the Oankali as an oppressive civilization while humans appear subjugated to the aliens' will. However, other times the author focuses on the peaceful lifestyle of trade villages in contrast to the violent and self-destructive behavior of resisters. This ambiguous representation of humans and the Oankali troubles the reader without giving him/her a response to the question of which civilization is the best.

Nevertheless, Butler not only compares two different lifestyles from a cultural point of view, exploring which values are associated to each of them, but she also, perhaps more indirectly, analyzes how the Oankali and humans organize in terms of social structures, economics and government. By talking about the lack of hierarchies among the Oankali we deduce that there are no social structures arranged in vertical layers. However, among the Oankali there are different social groups. The aliens divide themselves in families, and certain families occupy specific regions of the spaceship. Besides, among the Oankali there are those who never take part in genetic trades—the so called Akjai. Therefore, the Oankali society is structured according to certain patterns, but since the aliens are non-hierarchical, none of these groups holds more power than the others: they are all at the same social level and their voices are equally important when they need to reach an agreement. In trade villages the situation is similar and hierarchies do not exist, so all the inhabitants, whether human or Oankali, have the same status. However, the situation among resisters is not so peaceful. Some resisters live in villages in family units, but other resisters form groups that travel from town to town trading with goods and with kidnapped people.

Another contrast between the humans of the trade villages and those who resist the Oankali is the base of their economies. On the one hand, trade villages are sustainable places whose inhabitants feed on the crops they grow. There is no industry and no trade since they

grow what they need, and their buildings are made of an organic material similar to that of the Oankali spaceship. On the other hand, resisters try to live as they used to before the war, although the ancient infrastructures have almost totally disappeared, except for plastic fragments scattered in the jungle. The trade that exists among resisters not only includes food or other goods, but also weapons, women and construct children. One of the most shocking facts about resisters is that they even start to build ammunition factories, what reinforces the Oankali belief that humans are genetically flawed and driven to violence. Humans seem unable to leave their lifestyle behind despite its consequences.

There are several Oankali attitudes from which humans could easily learn, and one of them is the way they understand government. Among the Oankali there is no leader, and their lack of government has not plunged them into chaos. They govern by consensus, so power is completely decentralized, and as Kristina Busse comments in her analysis of the trilogy: "any decision is made communally, and displays of power are for the communal good only (for example, any human that kills another human or an Oankali is exiled onto the ship for lifelong surveillance)" (9). A visible example of how the Oankali government works is found when Akin travels to the spaceship to deepen his understanding of his Oankali nature. During his stay he proposes the idea of leaving humans on their own and, after some discussion, the Oankali agree to his proposal by deciding to establish a human colony on Mars. This decentralization of power and the fact that they only act on consensus reinforce the notion of the Oankali as a non-hierarchical society. In trade villages, the system is similar. For example, in Lo, the trade village where Lilith lives with her family, all the members gather with frequency, particularly when a new inhabitant arrives, so that they all can meet him/her, as with Tino's arrival. As we can see, the idea of community plays an important role in the Oankali society, in contrast to the more individualistic lifestyle of the resisters, who try to look for their own individual safety.

One of the possible reasons why the Oankali are portrayed as a non-hierarchical species is because their anatomy and their experiments enable them to understand that all forms of life are important to a varying extent. Since the Oankali are able to read the genetic structure of living organisms, they can see their inner beauty, sometimes hidden to the normal eye. Therefore, they are biologically programmed to respect all living creatures and thus to behave in non-hierarchical ways. The attitude towards hierarchy is perhaps the main contrast between humans and the Oankali, the contrast from where all the other differences between the two species originate. Because the Oankali understand that every creature has its function, and that something can be learned from all species, their attitude towards difference is one of

respect and even of veneration. When Nikanj talks to Lilith about their different reactions towards otherness it says: "'Different *is* threatening to most species,' Nikanj answered. 'Different is dangerous. It might kill you. That was true to your animal ancestors and your nearest animal relatives. And it's true for you'" (*LB* 186). But once Lilith, as well as other humans, starts living with the Oankali in the trade villages, she begins to adopt the Oankali view on difference, opposite to her first reaction when encountering an alien for the first time. When Akin is kidnapped by a group of resisters, he tries to understand why they are afraid of him, so he recalls Lilith's words: "Human beings fear difference," Lilith had told him once. "Oankali crave difference. Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status. Oankali seek difference and collect it […]. When you feel a conflict, try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference" (*LB* 329).

Many critics praise the Oankali acceptance of otherness, and an example of this is Adam Roberts when he states that "diversity and hybridity are the absolute *raison d'être* of these aliens" (107). Even though the Oankali crave for diversity, their attitude towards it results contradictory sometimes. For example, the spaceship they live in—as well as the organic vehicles they use as a means of transport—are organic creatures that have been modified to satisfy the Oankali's needs. Although this modification is not harmful and does not have negative results for the modified organisms, the alteration implies that even if the Oankali recognize diversity, they tend to make use of it for their own goals—there is no reference to the possible benefits these vehicles may receive from the Oankali. For this reason, their relationship with some of these organic entities may be referred to as one of instrumentalism rather than one of symbiosis. In his article "The Ambivalence of the Gene Trade in Octavia E. Butler's Xenogenesis Trilogy," Francisco Sáez de Adana comments on how the Oankali tend to omit the asymmetrical nature of the trades they propose (94).

Another moment in which their attitude towards diversity results somehow controversial is in their treatment of humans. The alien species states that they praise difference but, as Rebecca Holden comments, their "consumption of difference turns out to be not much better than the human repudiation of difference; both result in a domination and/or erasure of the 'other'" (51). The Oankali take all the human genetic material they need, which is enough to make women pregnant and even to clone people, but they do not allow humanity to start again on their own. Another interesting controversy appears in relation to Lilith's children. When Akin is born, the Oankali are somehow concerned because "A male who's Human enough to be born to a Human female could be a danger to us all" (*LB* 259). In the first stages of the gene trade male babies were only born of Oankali mothers, being Lilith the

first human mother of a male child. The Oankali are concerned for Akin because they are afraid that he will use his potential to act as many male humans had done before him: using his intelligence to guide his hierarchical thinking. This belief also implies that the Oankali think that male humans tend to be more violent than females, something that is reflected in the several violent events of the novel protagonized by male humans. This anxiety about Akin shows that the Oankali do not have a complete control over humans and over the hybrid children, and a similar situation takes place when Lilith gives birth to a child that will become the first ooloi born to a human mother, Jodahs. These examples show how the Oankali, despite their deep biochemical knowledge, are unable to foresee the consequences of the trade.

Perhaps, the way the Oankali perceive the world with their sensory organs is the reason why they are such a respectful and pacifist species. They understand chemistry and biology in a more subtle way than humans, so they treasure the genetic material of the species they make contact with because they understand their uniqueness. Taking this into account, we could say that the behavior and lifestyle of the Oankali is conditioned by their biology and, in particular, by their sensory organs, thus resulting in essentialism. In fact, both the Oankali and humans seem to be somehow limited by their biology since humans are also seen as biologically determined to be hierarchical. However, this does not necessarily imply that Butler is essentialist since in her novel we see how some humans reject their genetic flaw by living among the aliens.

These aliens' natural ability to understand the genetics of other species makes them understand their value and, therefore, to respect their uniqueness. For this reason, they reject violence and its consequences for the environment, thus contrasting with the violent attitudes of some of the humans in the novel:

> Oankali did not suggest violence. Humans said violence was against Oankali beliefs. Actually it was against their flesh and bone, against every cell of them. Humans had evolved from hierarchical life, dominating, often killing other life. Oankali had evolved from acquisitive life, collecting and combining with other life. To kill was not simply wasteful to the Oankali. It was as unacceptable as slicing off their own healthy limbs. They fought only to save their lives and the lives of others. Even then, they fought to subdue, not to kill. If they were forced to kill, they resorted to biological weapons collected genetically on thousand of worlds. They could be utterly deadly, but they paid for it later. It cost them so dearly that they had no history at all of striking out in anger, frustration, jealousy, or any other emotion, no matter how keenly they felt it. When they killed even to save life, they died a little themselves. (*LB* 564)

These words, Jodahs' thoughts, more or less the contrasting perceptions of violence. The main difference between the Oankali and humans is that the aliens do not allow emotions such as anger, frustration or jealousy, to drive their behavior because they are aware of how lethal

they can be and what it would cost them to harm another creature. When Jodahs talks about to the price they have to pay whenever they cause pain, it refers to the fact that somehow the Oankali receive that same pain in their own bodies. There is no clear explanation of why this is so, but this perception of the pain caused to others may be related to the biochemical processes that take place in their bodies whenever they hurt others.

Throughout the novels we see different episodes in which humans kill each other without remorse. As a contrast, the Oankali are careful not to harm others, and even not to allow others to suffer: some resisters ask the Oankali for help when they are sick and the Oankali help them without expecting anything in return. For example, when Akin is kidnapped and one of his captors is sick with an ulcer, he cannot understand why his friends do not stop his suffering by asking help of the Oankali: "It was *wrong* to allow such suffering, *utterly wrong* to throw away a life so unfinished, unbalanced, unshared" (*LB* 326; emphasis in original). As a construct child, Akin's Oankali nature makes him feel bad about the suffering of that man, who could have been easily saved by an ooloi. However, the reasons why the Oankali want to preserve life do not seem completely altruistic since they depend on other species for their survival. We can see this in the words of Akin about the dying man when says it was wrong to throw a life so "unshared," meaning that the uniqueness of that individual will be lost forever to the Oankali—whose survival and evolution are based on sharing genetic data—evem though his disease could be easily healed by an ooloi. The Oankali think that their survival depends on other creatures and on the genetic trade with them, and for this reason they try to establish symbiotic relationship with the creatures they encounter, especially if they entail genetic trade. But humans do not realize their dependence on their planet and the other species that inhabit it—the consequence of this is the nuclear war mentioned in the novel—even though they depend on others for their survival as much as the Oankali. I think that when the Oankali teach humans to survive on their own by growing crops, they are also making humans aware of their dependence on the ecosystem, something they seem to have forgotten.

In the previous pages of this section the main focus of the analysis has been the different reactions and behaviors of humans and the Oankali towards otherness and difference. Precisely, this encounter with difference is, for both species, one of the main issues in the novel, and it is also related to another important idea that appears throughout the novels: the concept of humanity. Adele S. Newson in her review of the first part of the novel posits that all the events that take place in it lead to the question of "what does it mean to be human?" (393). Concepts such as empathy or mercy, usually defined as part of humanity

appear in the novel as part of the alien nature rather than of the human one. This, together with the appearance of construct children at the beginning of the second novel, invites readers to redefine the idea of humanity so that it encompasses not only human beings but also hybrid creatures with traces of humanness.

At the beginning of *LB*, once we are aware of the subjugated position of humans in the novel, readers probably expect the appearance of a human rescuer that would free the other humans from the Oankali yoke. The first figure that emerges as a hero is Lilith, an African American woman who, in spite of accepting the Oankali trade, teaches humans how to survive on Earth without the Oankali. By choosing Lilith as the heroine, Butler challenges our assumptions since Lilith herself represents otherness, ando so, her position as the *other* because of her origins and gender favors her role as a bridge between humans and the Oankali. In the second part, *Adulthood Rites*, the role of hero is transmitted to one of Lilith's children, Akin, who becomes the savior of humanity by being allowed to start a human colony on Mars with those who reject the trade. Therefore, once more, Butler makes a hero of a character that represents otherness: "The hope for the future of human civilization rests with a black man, who also happens to be alien" (Newson 396). I think that Butler's choice of heroes echoes the main message of the novel, that is, the acceptance of otherness. The survival of humanity depends on the decisions of these characters, whose appearances and backgrounds differ from those of the traditional heroes of SF. Besides, the fact that it is a hybrid young adult who saves humanity from extinction is quite significant if we take into account how some humans treat him—they want to sell him, and later they burn down the house where he lies while going through his metamorphosis. Akin's dual nature—human and alien—enables him to understand the situation of humans but also to be able to propose a deal the Oankali can agree to.

The boundary between alien and human is a key aspect in the novel, especially if we consider the situation of humans throughout the work. In the first part, humans are a minority in the Oankali spaceship, thus subjected to a powerlessness status. But humans do not only lose the control of their lives and of their ability to breed; they are also treated with condescension as the aliens tell them of their flaws as if it were their fault. Then, seeing through Lilith's eyes show us how humans are deprived of their position of power to become the aliens. Once humans are allowed to go back to Earth, most of them run away from the Oankali to establish resister villages where they try to live as they used to do before the war. However, their situation is a precarious one since they are not able to breed, thus doomed to extinction. When Akin achieves his goal and is allowed to establish a human colony on Mars

where humans will be free to breed without the Oankali, humans become once more a minority travelling to a hostile world, or as Jenny Wolmark posits: humans "have to become the aliens" again if they want "to preserve their version of humanity" (*Aliens* 37).

Leaving apart those humans that finally travel to Mars to start a new life there, I want to focus on those humans who accept the Oankali trade and on the children born of that trade. From the title of the trilogy we can see that these books are about the origin of a new species. In her article "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler's XENOGENESIS," Cathy Peppers focuses on the title of the novel and states that "XENOGENESIS is an origin story, a story about the origins of human identity, but it is a story with a difference" (n.p.). The word "xenogenesis" is a Greek compound formed by the word *xeno-* (ξένος) and the word -genesis (γένεσις). The interesting aspect is that whereas the word genesis (γένεσις) clearly means "origin," the word xenos (ξένος) means both "guest-friend" and "stranger" or "foreigner" (Lidell and Scott 1189). These two possible meanings, that can be so contradictory, are quite significant considering the events of the novel, in which humans and aliens are represented both as "guest-friends" and "strangers." On the one hand, the Oankali rescue some humans whom they treat more or less as guests while studying them. And even though most humans are kept in suspended animation, they are kept well fed and without receiving any harm. On the other hand, the Oankali stop being strangers once some humans decide to accept the trade and develop a close friendship, as the one between Lilith and Nikanj. Besides, if we interpret the word "xenogenesis" as a whole, as Pepper does in her article, we realize that in the context of biology "xenogenesis" means "the production of offspring different from either of its parents" (n.p.). This second option is more closely related to the title given to the edition of the book I am using in my references, *Lilith's Brood.* In both cases, the title focuses on the future of humanity, which is represented by Lilith's children.

The idea of producing offspring that is different from either of its parents also challenges the boundary between humans and aliens, which may be a discomforting idea for humans. When Lilith is told that she is pregnant, she rejects the fact by saying that what is inside of her is nothing but a monster—Nikanj had made her pregnant without her permission and without her noticing it, and that makes Lilith angry. Besides, she does not like the idea of having a hybrid child growing in her body in spite of Nikanj's positive portrayal:

> "Our children will be better than either of us," it continued. "We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lessen our physical limitations. Our children won't destroy themselves in a war, and if they need to regrow a limb or to change themselves in some other way they'll be able to do it. And there will be other benefits."
>
> "But they won't be human," Lilith said. "That's what matters. You can't understand, but that *is* that matters." (*LB* 247-48)

Although Nikanj tries to convince Lilith of the advantages of the gene trade between humans and the Oankali, Lilith rejects the idea on the grounds that the hybrid children will be monsters and not human at all. However, this is Lilith's point of view at the end of the first novel and after having suffered a traumatic episode in which she discovers the corpse of her partner, Joseph, and in which she is told of her pregnancy.

Years later, and after having had several children with Joseph's sperm, her opinion about hybrid children and their role in the future of humanity has changed to a more understanding one. While discussing this issue with Tino, he expresses his concerns at the lack of options with which humans have been left, just as Lilith had done in the past. However, her response is conciliatory rather than reactionary: "But some of what makes us Human will survive, just as some of what makes them Oankali will survive" (*LB* 282). Lilith's words can be interpreted in two different ways: first, we could say she has finally surrendered to the Oankali; second, the birth of her children made her understand that the trade with the Oankali was not as bad as she believed since her children are not monsters at all. Although we may conclude that she has finally incorporated to the Oankali, she shows some sort of rebellious behavior when she stays alone in the forest from time to time, as a way of proving that she still retains some of her independence. Lilith's evolution responds to her acknowledgement of the impossibility for humans to survive as a species without evolving in some way. Then, by accepting the trade Lilith echoes Butler's belief that human beings need to change their values and lifestyle if they want to survive.

Although throughout the novels Butler represents humans as doomed to extinction because of their hierarchical thinking, she also offers them two possible solutions. For most part of the trilogy humans must accept the Oankali or die sterile; but thanks to Akin, humans are finally granted the possibility of going to Mars to breed on their own. Even if Butler proposes these two choices, she retains the pessimistic tone for those humans who go to Mars, and who, according to the Oankali, will eventually destroy themselves. Nonetheless, Butler's solution to the suicidal behavior of humans lies on the acceptance of alienness and of a hybrid offspring. Then, Butler's concept of evolution is based on the acceptance of otherness, which implies the acceptance of alternative non-hierarchical lifestyles. Many critics agree that the only hope for humans lies in the hybrid future she provides in such a hopeful tone (Tucker 166), and, in fact we can see that despite some controversial behaviors in their treatment of humans, the Oankali lifestyle is better than humans' in terms of pacifism and respect.

We can also see that Butler's hope lies in a hybrid future with her choice of the titles of the three parts that make up *LB*, especially if we consider the last one. The first part is entitled *Dawn* and we can interpret Lilith's awakening—and that of the remaining humans—not only as the end of a period of being in suspended animation but also as her awakening to a new life. The second part, *Adulthood Rites*, focuses on how the next step in evolution, Akin—as the first male born to a human mother—has to cope with his two different natures: the human and the alien. But it is the title of the last part, *Imago*, the one which is more meaningful taking into account the future Butler proposes for humanity. Cathy Peppers points out that the term "imago" means "the 'perfect stage' of an animal at the end of its evolution" (n.p.), an idea that reflects what happens in the third part of the novel. For Peppers, the choice of the term *Imago* for the title of the third part is not casual, and she suggests that Butler's trilogy is not only a story of the origin of a news species but it is also "a story of evolution in which the 'most fit' will survive" (n.p.). According to Butler and her novels, the "most fit" to survive are precisely those who choose peace and consensus over violence, respect over hatred, and clearly difference and otherness over hierarchical thought. In this world that Butler creates, the future is represented not by the empowerment of an individual or of a particular group over the rest, but by the equal position of all the members. Since the Oankali lifestyle is based on embracing difference, and otherness is encouraged rather than used as a justification for oppression, this future society Butler envisions is characterized by hybridity and otherness. This defense of hybridity is also supported by the three different narrative voices we find in the novel, which reflect the importance of community by not empowering just an individual hero.

The hybrid society Butler proposes as a solution to humans' hierarchical behavior opens a door in the genre of SF itself. In most SF novels—and movies—that portray the encounter between humans and aliens, we usually find that one of the species results partially or totally eradicated, as in *The War of the Worlds* or *Ender's Game.* In this novel, however, we see that the conflict is not solved through violence but through an agreement that results in the creation of a posthuman society based on hybridity. As Kristina Busse comments, this complicity and symbiosis that exists between humans and the Oankali show that Butler "resists more simplistic notions of pure antagonistic positions and clear dichotomies but instead describes a world predicated on concepts of impurity, contamination and hybridity" (Busse 2). Therefore, the future Butler envisions for humanity is not the result of the overspecialization of a species—which could even entail the disappearance of the members of

that society considered "unfit" for survival from the perspective of eugenics—but what the author proposes is hybridity, otherness and change, as a way of improving the species.

Considering the issue of hybridity in the novel, we need to highlight Haraway's idea of the cyborg as a creature that trespasses boundaries and uses its monstrosity to destabilize binary oppositions and hierarchies. In her "Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway refers to different characters of SF narratives that she refers to as cyborgs, and she mentions several novels by Octavia Butler. For Haraway, the cyborg is an important element in feminist SF because it destabilizes social categories, or, as she states: "[cyborgs] make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual entity, or body" (*Simians* 178). Therefore, Haraway's cyborg is not understood as an organism made up of both machinery and flesh, but as a creature that trespasses boundaries, destabilizes hierarchies and challenges established assumptions. In this sense, Butler's Lilith can be described as a cyborg, a woman who adapts to the situation she is forced to live in.

Lilith becomes a cyborg not only because her body is altered to make it stronger but also because of her role as a mediator for establishing the future that awaits humans (Haraway, *Simians* 179). In her article "The High Costs of Cyborg Survival: Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis Trilogy," Rebecca Holden also refers to Lilith as a cyborg—following Haraway's definition—because she realizes that even if she risks becoming a traitor to her species, "making meaningful and potent connections with the truly different […] will not be easy but may be necessary" (49). With her so-called betrayal, Lilith trespasses boundaries when she becomes the mother of a new species that represents the only possible future for human beings. But Rebecca Holden also uses the term cyborg when she refers to the Oankali. She states that the Oankali can be considered cyborgs according to Haraway's definition because they challenge "our traditional notions of gender, identity and reproduction" (Holden 51). The Oankali challenge our idea of gender because the third gender of the Oankali, the ooloi, destabilizes the human binary opposition of male/female. It is also the ooloi the one that challenges our notion of reproduction since breeding becomes a biochemical process organized by an external figure.

Holden also relates the cyborg nature of the Oankali with the way they also challenge "our notions of societal identities and structures in three primary ways" (51). In first place she comments on the lack of hierarchy in the Oankali society, in which all decisions are made by consensus, giving each individual the opportunity to express himself/herself/itself. Besides, as a consequence of the lack of hierarchies, the Oankali find it difficult to understand competitive behavior or violence. Secondly, the aliens challenge our structures by "having a

special reverence for anything living" (Holden 51). The Oankali are able to appreciate value in any living organism and for this reason respect is one of the main features of their society. Finally, Holden mentions that since the Oankali value life, they are also able to find beauty in otherness. In fact, we could say the Oankali feed on difference because it is the trade with other living organisms which enables the Oankali to evolve. They do not only praise and study difference, but they also "need to include it within themselves" (51).

Apart from Lilith and the Oankali, we could also use the term cyborg to refer to the hybrid children born of the gene trade between humans and aliens. Through Akin and Jodahs readers can envision the possibilities of the cyborg and its adaptable nature. As the title *Imago* suggests, Jodahs represents the last evolutionary step in the hybrid-cyborg future of humanity. As an ooloi, Jodahs is able to modify genes but also to modify its own appearance thanks to the use of cancer cells. Besides, he can adapt its body so that it is easier for it to survive in a particular environment, something that contrasts with the fact that humans have manipulated their ecosystem so that it satisfies their need, rather than the other way around. An example of Jodahs adaptability can be seen when it stays a long time in the water and its body starts to change: "My fingers and toes became webbed on the third day, and I didn't bother to correct them. I was wet at least as often as I was dry. My hair fell out and I developed a few more sensory tentacles. I stopped wearing clothing, and my coloring changed to gray-green" (*LB* 591). Therefore, Jodahs does not only deconstruct the dualism human/alien, but with the ability of its body to adapt to its surroundings also deconstructs the binary oppositions mind/body and human/animal. Moreover, Jodahs's body does not only change depending on what is around it, but also depending on who is close to it. When Jodahs and its family find João, and he spends the nights with Jodahs, the ooloi starts to grow breasts and its face develops feminine attributes. This sex-determined change echoes Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which the inhabitants of the planet Gethen remain androgynes most of their sexual cycle, except for a couple of days when they develop one sex or another, depending on their sexual partner. Therefore, the last stage of evolution personified in Jodahs does not only entail the destruction of the dualisms human/alien and human/animal, but also that of male/female. Jodahs, as many of Butler's female characters, is able to adapt to the circumstances, becoming this way a survivor and representing the cyborg future of humanity.

Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy uses the encounter with the alien as a means to explore what it means to be human. For this purpose, humans are deprived of their status as masters to become a minority species that depends on an alien civilization, the Oankali. In her exploration of what humanity is, Butler analyzes different reactions to gender, race and

otherness, by continually playing with the ideas of human and alien, and by staging role reversals. As Patricia Melzer states, by crossing "the physical boundary between un-human and human creatures" Butler "undermines the privileged position of humans" (71), and this allows the audience to reflect on power discourses, hierarchical thinking and the dualism self-other. By turning humans into a powerless group, Butler invites readers to put themselves in the place of alienated human and non-human *others.*

In her exploration of the definition of humanity, Butler plays with two opposing societies. The author portrays humans as doomed to destruction because of their hierarchical thinking. In order to support her vision, she starts the novel in the aftermath of a nuclear war, but throughout the books she also presents several episodes in which humans behave in violent and disrespectful ways, especially towards women and ethnic minorities. In contrast, the Oankali appear as an almost perfect society that lives in harmony with their surroundings. The aliens are described as non-hierarchical and as respectful and pacifist, although some of their attitudes towards humans are somehow controversial. Butler resolves this confrontation between species and humans' flawed nature by creating a future in which both species join in order to breed hybrid children. Butler's hybrid future seems to suggest that humanity needs to redefine itself because otherwise violence and hierarchical thinking could lead to the destruction of the Earth and all its life forms. The construct children born out of the gene trade between humans and the Oankali create a kind of utopian society in which fluidity and change replace the rigid structures and the dualistic thinking of human society.

Joan Slonczewski's novel *A Door into Ocean* also explores the idea of what it means to be human by playing continually with the concepts of human and alien. On the one hand, the reason why Merwen and Usha stay in Valedon at the beginning of the novel is because they want to see if Valans can be considered humans, and thus, if they should be treated as such. Among Sharers there is no consensus on the status of Valans since their violent and disrespectful behavior makes them children in the eyes of the inhabitants of Shora. By considering Valans as children, Sharers imply that Valans need to be educated, that they need to "share knowledge," as Sharers would say. Therefore, Sharers see themselves as humans whereas they do not have clear the position of Valans. On the other hand, Valans do not consider Sharers as human beings since many times they refer to Sharers as animals, sometimes using the term "catfish." Even when Valans realize that Sharers' knowledge in genetics is far superior than Valans' they are not able to see that both Valans and Sharers are human beings that evolved in different ways in order to adapt to the ecosystems of their

respective planets. Apart from considering how Valans and Sharers see each other in terms of humanness, we also need to take into account the position of the reader with regard to these two civilizations. From a physical and cultural point of view, it is easier for readers to identity with Valans—and especially with Spinel since he is the main Valan protagonist. The alien appearance of Sharers—with their purplish-blue skin, webbed fingers and toes—and their particular lifestyle make readers think of them as aliens.

In *ADIO* Slonczewski portrays two conflicting societies. On the one hand, we have the planet Valedon that belongs to an empire governed by a figured called the Patriarch of Torr. Valedon social and power structures can be related to those of Western societies on Earth, or as Diane Koester has described it: "an imaginary dystopia with earth-like aspects" (n.p.). On the other hand, Slonczewski portrays Shora, a planet-moon covered completely by water and inhabited by a female society whose members call themselves Sharers. In *Frankenstein's Daughters,* Jane Donawerth comments that Slonczewski's Sharers are a combination of "the alien lesbian utopia with the trope of alien mothers on Shora" (97). This way, Slonczewski rewrites the SF narrative so popular in the pulps of the first half of the 20th century in which an alien planet was inhabited by monstrous women with animal-like features.

Throughout the novel we can see how Sharers and Valans treat each other with suspicion, trying to find the other's place in the order of things. For example, at the beginning of the novel while Merwen and Usha are in Valedon, some Valan citizens reflect on Sharers: "Shora, the Ocean Moon. Roald remembered, now. With their herbs and seasilk, moontraders brought holocubes of the women-like creatures who lived in the endless sea, women whose men were never seen, who subsisted on seaworms and could dive deep beyond light's reach without going mad" (*ADIO* 9). In this example, Roald describes Sharers as similar to human beings, but in his words we can also see the skepticism with which Sharers are referred to. At some points in the book Valans think that Sharers have some kind of supernatural or magical power and this seems to be suggested in the words: "[they] could dive deep beyond light's reach without going mad." But sometimes Sharers are also considered animals or inferior beings: "They descend from catfish, and they spin magic from seaweed" (*ADIO* 5). In this last quote we can see that even if there is a reference to the supposed magical powers of Sharers, they are considered nonetheless non-human animals because their origin is related to catfish. Similar words come to Spinel's mind in the first pages of the novel when, observing Merwen and Usha, he thinks: "*But they aren't even human"* (*ADIO* 23; emphasis in original).

In her article "Single-Sexed Utopias and Our Two-Sexed Reality," Susan Stone-Blackburn analyzes the reasons why Valans treat Sharers as an inferior species. In first place,

it is necessary for readers to realize that there are no men living among Sharers until the arrival of Spinel—there are some Valan traders but they do not live with Sharers. In the eyes of the patriarchal society of Valedon, that is reason enough to consider Sharers with suspicion. Besides, since there are no males in Sharer society, its members develop homosexual relationships that may be somehow shocking to Valans—there is no mention of homosexual relationships among Valans. Apart from the differences that we can find at the level of social structures, differences in physical appearance also play an important role. This can be clearly seen in Nisi and how different her appearance as a Valan wealthy woman is in contrast with how she looks after spending sometime in Shora with her skin becoming purplish-blue. Although the Valan traders on Shora are used to Sharers's appearance, their particular physical differences make them consider Sharers a kind of non-human animal, as most Valans believe them to be. Sharers do not wear clothes and their skin is purplish-blue, their fingers and toes are webbed and there is no hair covering their bodies except when they are born. Stone-Blackburn also comments on Sharers' abilities as genetic engineers as one more cause to be othered by Valans, who cannot understand how such a powerful civilization decides to resist non-violently without making use of their biochemical knowledge. We can see that there are several reasons why Valans distrust Sharers, but these reasons do not justify the pejorative treatment suffered by Sharers, nor the tortures and the violence they suffer at the hands of Valan soldiers. These oppressive practices may be based on a speciesist trend in Valan behavior, since racism cannot be considered because Valans see Sharers as non-human animals.

But we can also see how some Sharers treat Valans as inferior beings, to the extent that they question if they are human at all. Sharers and Valans share the same origin, but these women's bodies became adapted to the ecosystem of Shora and to the absence of men, and for these reasons their anatomy is slightly different from that of Valans—the differences are small and on a superficial level, but Valans seem unable to see their shared features. However, and because of the violent and disrespectful behavior of some Valans, some Sharers wonder if Valans can be called humans since they measure humanness according to Sharer values. For example, Lystra reacts very negatively to Spinel's arrival at Shora: "Lystra glared in consternation at the new Valan creature her mother and mothersister had brought home. *It* stood there, swathed in 'trader's rags,' head of a bristlefish and mouth agape stupidly. And carrying *stones*, no less; stones, to this of all silkhouses" (*ADIO* 56; emphasis in original). In order to understand Lystra's hard words we have to take into account that her former lover suffers from stonesickness and that Valan traders continue selling her stones even though they

know she is sick. But Lystra is not the only Sharer that treats Valans with suspicion and sometimes even hatred: "Valans don't live as humans; as lesser sharers, they have no place in the balance of life. Even seaswallowers have a place on Shora. But the ocean turned for eons without Valans. So now let's get rid of them" (*ADIO* 78). Although Merwen and Usha bring Spinel to Shora to show that Valans are humans, some Sharers like Yinevra reject the possibility of the humanity of Valans because their values include violence and oppression—concepts that do not exist among Sharers. Some Sharers consider Valans as lesser sharers, which indicates that they occupy a lower status than most of the creatures on Shora, especially because the planet has survived without them for centuries. Even Merwen, who defends Valans' status as human beings, admits that their behavior is not completely human because they are afraid and their fears make them behave in violent ways (Koester n.p.). Also Joan Slonczewski in her "Study Guide" comments that Sharers often say that Valans are sick because they are violent and immature when facing their fears.

The position of readers regarding the two civilizations that appear in the novel offers different analyses of the events that take place. Since at the beginning Merwen and Ushar are seen as the outsiders and Spinel appears as the protagonist, most readers would identify with him, who refers to the Sharers as alien subjects. Besides, Valan lifestyle is more similar to our own if we consider their social structures, government and economy, in contrast to the Sharer world. Then, the evolution of Spinel, by discovering how Sharers' values are healthier from a social point of view, is also experienced by readers, who become critical of some of the measures taken by the Valan army, just as Spinel does. Therefore, even if it is easier for readers to identify with Valans, seeing them as humans, they end up realizing that Sharers' values are more representative of those associated with humanness.

Even though at the beginning of the novel both civilizations appear completely opposed, little by little we see how individuals of each society bridge the gap with understanding and respect. Spinel shows Sharers that Valans are human beings and that some of them can even adapt to their lifestyle on Shora. On the other hand, Spinel and other Valans, like some scientists that learn Sharer techniques, finally understand that Sharers are human beings like them, but with a different appearance and a different conceptual framework. If we consider the evolution of the character of Spinel, we can clearly see how Slonczewski plays with the idea of who the *other* is, since Spinel continually shifts his position in the binary self/other. At the beginning of the novel, he appears in his home planet surrounded by people like him, but little after he travels to Shora, where he feels alienated. What happens from his arrival at Shora to the end of the novel when he decides to stay there with Lystra is a complex

process of adaptation that entails the acceptance of his otherness as a male Valan in a society of female Sharers.

When Spinel arrives at Shora, he realizes his position as the *other* in the Sharer society because he is a male Valan in a female society that regards him with doubts and distrust. Just after landing on Shora Spinel is shocked by the otherness of the ecosystem, because of its lack of land. With his concern for the safety of the journey and for living on the surface of the water, Spinel is afraid of not being able to survive but also afraid of the very otherness of the planet, where he cannot find any trace of the Valan landscape he is used to. Spinel tries to live on Shora as he used to live on Valedon but little by little he comes to accept Sharer ways. For example, at first he tries to continue eating what he used to eat at home, but Sharers have to pay a high price for his food. Later on, when he learns about it, he starts eating the same things Sharers do, even if he finds them disgusting. Perhaps the turning point in Spinel's resistant attitude toward Sharer lifestyle is when his skin starts becoming purplish-blue because of the breathmicrobes that enable Sharers to stay underwater long periods of time. When he realizes his skin is changing, he asks Nisi for a medicine that reverses the process. At first, he thinks of taking the medicine because he cannot stand the transformation: "I just want to be normal" (*ADIO* 98), but then he decides to let the microbes change his appearance. With this decision, Spinel is accepting the otherness of Shora as part of him, thus normalizing his situation among the Sharers.

After staying several months on Shora, Spinel hears that the Valan army has occupied his hometown to stop some revolts, so he decides to travel to Valedon to see if his family is safe. When he gets there Spinel progressively realizes that it is not his home anymore. Since Shora has become his new home, Spinel feels somehow alienated in Valedon in spite of being with his family. For this reason, when he is told that there is a war on Shora and that Sharers are dying, he decides to go back to the ocean moon in order to act as a kind of diplomat between the two civilizations. Although he is aware that his position is difficult and that he may be tortured or even killed, he realizes that: "a life worth dying for is worth living a little longer" (*ADIO* 340). At the end of the novel, and after the war between Valedon and Shora has ended, Spinel has to decide whether he wants to stay on Shora or not, since Sharers want to stop any contact with the other planet. Although he doubts whether he should stay on Shora and leave his Valan life behind—he is still the *other*, especially once the contact with Valedon ends—, when he sees Lystra going back to Raia-el he thinks: "Lystra's craft sped on, and his heart strained after it, taut as the harness of the glider squid. Could he bear to stay here, a freak for the rest of his life? What did that matter, if Lystra would carry a child in whose veins

his own blood swam?" (*ADIO* 402). Spinel's condition as the *other* is finally overcome with his choice of staying with Lystra, because that is the moment when he realizes that Valans and Sharers more similar than different. Besides, through his experiences among the two civilizations, he has learned that Sharer lifestyle has much more to offer; and that even though he felt alienated when he arrived on Shora, his home is among Sharers.

With the continuous shift of perspectives in the novel, we see how the different characters continually play with the concepts of human and alien. But it is Spinel, with his journeys and his interior conflicts, who truly encompasses the two concepts of human and the *other*. For Edward F. Higgins, Spinel functions "as a symbolic bridge between the two worlds that must take place on an individual scale if there is to be a recognition of mutual humanity between Valedon and Shora [...]. He must, as it were, get into an alien skin to experience Shoran humanity as well as to be recognized as human himself by the ocean world sisters" (n.p.). When Spinel decides to stay on Shora, he embraces his otherness as a male in a female society, but he is also aware that by becoming a Sharer, for Valans he becomes the *other*.

The question of humanity versus alienness in the novel is not only explored through the differences in the physical appearance of the individuals of both societies. Although anatomical differences can be considered the most striking ones, Valans and Sharers also differ in their politics, social structures and attitudes towards violence. In fact, these disparities between the two civilizations are sometimes used to justify the treatment of the other civilization as inferior. For example, the simplicity of Sharers' political and economic systems make Valans believe that the inhabitants of Shora are not a developed society. Therefore, in the representation of otherness Slonczewski not only focuses on the more external features of a particular civilization but she also explores its internal social arrangement. In so doing, the author offers a contrast between two lifestyles while inviting readers to reflect on alternative economics, social structures and politics.

On Valedon, economics is usually based on the exploitation of natural resources to create technological devices. In some aspects, Valan society is far more developed than ours, especially if we consider that they have spaceships that travel across the universe and robots that look like humans and that make life easier for those who can afford one. However, these technological devices are not within reach of the lower classes since the Valan society is strongly polarized. The breach between social classes can be clearly seen if we compare Spinel's and Berenice's lifestyles, their education, clothing and social behavior. Whereas Spinel's family sometimes has economic problems and lives in a humble area, Nisi lives in a building similar to a palace with servos that do everything for her. Another important aspect

of Valan economy is that it is based on inorganic materials, from the stones that individuals wear at their necks to show their professional and social position, to the complex structures of robots, spaceships and building is general: "The soldier-place stuck out of the sea, a bloated squid of a building upon an artificial "raft" of whatever dead stuff Valans used" (*ADIO* 237).

Shora is a completely different world regarding economy. Donawerth describes Shoran economy as "communalistic" (96), meaning that the concept of property does not exist for Sharers. In fact, the very name of the inhabitants of Shora, Sharers, has a communalistic bias. The idea of sharing is at the basis of Shoran society, both in a material and an immaterial way. Sharers work together when a raft is in trouble, and during the seaswallower season, they do not doubt to risk their lives to save others. They share the planet itself because they do not believe in individual property so they take advantage of each other's advances in developments by using clickflies to communicate them. Another way in which Sharers share knowledge is by meeting in gatherings—as they call them—in which, apart from sharing ideas and discoveries, they discuss communal matters. One of the most interesting meetings of this type in the novel takes place when Spinel, and then a Valan soldier, explain to Sharers that they have nothing to fear from stones, which is the base of Valan industry.

In contrast with Valans, Sharer industry is based on organic materials, from the rafts they live in, to the substances they use to make the medicines and the seasilk they trade with: "'We shared seasilk and herbs,' said Merwen, 'but no coin or other non-lifestuff'" (*ADIO* 44). Since Sharers are not used to working with inorganic entities, stones are regarded either with suspicion or with fascination to the point of obsession. Some Sharers suffer from "stonesickness" becoming obsessed with the idea that life has never touched them: "stone was as hard as coral yet as empty as death. No living presence fashioned iron and quartz: these things grew in fire as coral grew in water. Such things had no place on Shora" (*ADIO* 57). The interesting fact is that stones are also present on Shora, at the bed of the ocean, a place Sharers associate with death. For Valans, however, stone plays an important role because they export it to other planets "which had exhausted their own supplies of various rare minerals" (*ADIO* 28). In fact, another reason why Valans are interested in Shora—apart from their scientific knowledge—is because of the large amount of minerals in the seabed where, according to Sharers, the dead dwell. Although during most of the novel, stones are regarded with hatred and as representatives of Valan greed, at the end Sharers understand they have nothing to fear from them when Spinel explains to Sharers that stones are made up of the same particles and elements that the rest of nature, including living organisms. It is somehow surprising that despite Sharers' scientific knowledge they had not realized the nature of stones

earlier. Although the author does not offer any explanation, it might appear that Sharers do not know about stones because they had never paid them any attention once they were identified as inorganic. The role of Spinel in helping Sharers understand stones is related to his position as a bridge between the two civilizations, making them understand they are not so different one from the other.

Considering politics, Shora and Valedon could be described as opposite extremes. Whereas Shora is an independent planet, Valedon belongs to an empire governed by a dictator called the Patriarch of Torr who delegates his powers in figures like that of the Envoy—who in the novel is a robot. The Patriarch has stayed in power for a long period of time, which makes us suppose that maybe he does not really exist other than as a symbolic political figure and that the power is in the hands of a group. The government of the empire exerts its power through violence, as we can see when Spinel goes back to his hometown and finds it controlled by the army who imposes its rules and curfew in order to stop the revolts. In analyzing the politics of Valedon, Jane Donawerth states that Valedon is made up of city-states continually at war with each other, which is interesting since she points out that "the economies of the world depend on war" (95). Although in the novel the Patriarch of Torr continues having power, in the subsequent novels of the Elyseum cycle, taking place centuries after *A Door into Ocean*, we learn that the wars ended up with the empire, and that the war on Shora had been the turning point.

As commented previously, Valedon and Shora could be said to represent political extremes since in Valedon power is in the hands of a unique person—with his delegates—while on Shora power is shared among Sharers. Sharers do not have a representative political figure, and when Merwen is chosen by the Envoy—when he arrives on Shora to check Sharers' scientific advances—it is not because she has more power than the rest, but because she knows how to express herself—she is called a "wordweaver"—and because she has been in contact with Valans. Political power in Shora is not held by an individual since it is communal. When Sharers need to discuss a problem they communicate with each other using clickflies, but they also use gatherings to debate serious issues. Higgins points out that Sharers' gatherings are quite similar to Quaker Meetings for Business, in which Quakers exchange their points of view and debate in order to reach a certain understanding. Regarding this type of consensus, Slonczewski writes:

> This means that within a Quaker community, all decisions must be made by "spiritual consensus," in concurrence with the spirit of all individuals--without exception. Thus one individual may have an exceptionally strong calling from God, preventing a wrong action by

> the entire group. This happens among the Sharers, when Merwen effectively blocks the will of a Gathering to use violence against the occupying soldiers. ("Study Guide" n.p.)

During Sharers' Gatherings, as the one devoted to the question of Valan humanity, these women share their opinion considering all the possible approaches before reaching a consensus. In relation to how Quakerism permeates Sharers, Diane Koester points out that in Shora politics and the ecosystem are intertwined since "to Sharers, all life is infused with the life force Shora; all Sharers share both Shora's autonomous power and responsibility to all else" (n.p.). Therefore, since the planet is in itself a living network, all creatures share responsibility and power in an equal way. Because of this particular way of governing themselves, Jean Donawerth describes the politics of Shora as "a pure democracy that acts collectively by full consensus" (96). This particular type of government surprises Valans, and especially Spinel, since they think that a government is necessary to keep things in order:

> The more he thought, the more puzzled he became. It was true that Valedon would be in chaos without someone to lay down the law. Yet on Shora, things worked just the opposite: no one person could set a law for anyone else, and even if they tried, it would only create chaos, not curb it. Were people just different, on different planets? (*ADIO* 225)

Spinel realizes that if Valedon tried to live according to Sharers' politics, there would be chaos. But he also notices that if someone tried to impose his or her will on Sharers, the situation would also be chaotic. This is related to the idea of hierarchy since in Valedon, a hierarchical society, social structures are quite fixed and those in power exert their control over the lower classes. However, in a non-hierarchical society like the one we find in Shora, and where everyone shares things and knowledge with the others, it would be unconceivable to have someone forcing Sharers to do something.

Related to the idea of politics and of how stability is achieved in the two worlds is the attitude of these two societies toward violence. In Valedon, its city-states are continuously at war with each other. Besides, within the empire governed by the Patriarch of Torr, rebellions are put down with army interventions—as in Spinel's hometown—, and violence is the means by which control is exerted and stability maintained. Diane Koester comments that since Valedon is a "militaristic world" its way of controlling population is through "physical violence, prison, terror, and killing" (n.p.). The most outrageous violent events in the novel take place during the invasion of Shora. Little by little Valan soldiers become exasperated at the pacifist response of Sharers, who are unable to understand violence. Although Sharers would be able to create plagues that would force Valans to abandon Shora, they prefer not to use them because of their possible consequences for the ecosystem. This behavior annoys

Valans even more because they find it difficult to use their weapons against women and children who are not attacking them but just resisting in a peaceful way. Therefore, instead of having a war with two armies fighting against each other, Slonczewski portrays an army trying to control a non-violent population with techniques such as torture both physical and psychological.

The non-violent attitude of Sharers is at the very basis of their nature. These women believe that all living forms are part of a big network, and for this reason even the smallest creatures play a role in the balance of the ecosystem. Then, any violent behavior against another creature is against their set of beliefs, and killing—or "death hastening" as they say—is completely unacceptable (Wolf n.p.). Besides, and as a consequence of this interdependent network of life, the inhabitants of Shora conceive any possible human action as a process of sharing. This way, any murder committed in their society harms both the victim and the murderer. But even if there is little violence among Sharers, their world is not peaceful but a harsh one. An ocean ecosystem like Shora is full of dangerous creatures that may be lethal to Sharers, such as fleshborers and seaswallowers. But even when their lives are at risk, Sharers prefer not to alter the ecosystem because they accept nature as it is, even if that may mean their death. As a consequence of their way of thinking, Sharers are mostly vegetarians and those who eat animals do so in a sustainable way. Donawerth notices that shockwraiths—sea creatures that look like octopuses—"are hunted for their arms" but they are not killed because Sharers know that if the arm of the animal is cut off, it grows again (*ADIO* 99). But even when they are forced to kill small animals to feed on, they sing for them in the same way they sing for the death of a human Sharer: "Their voices wove eerily with the roar of the sea. Spinel watched, mystified, until Lady Nisi leaned over to whisper, 'We sing for the fish, for those sharers of our sea who die that we may feed'" (*ADIO* 84).

When Sharers face the invasion of Valans and start being killed, whether by accident or on purpose, their reaction is not that of poisoning Valans with some plague, as some Sharers propose. Instead of counterattacking, Sharers agree to put into practice a series of acts of non-violent resistance. Jane Donawerth points out that even if Sharers have not experienced a war for centuries, they "have developed a variety of psychological strategies to handle conflict, including 'witnessing' in groups against someone (a sit-in), and 'unspeaking' between individuals" (96). "Witnessing" implies a group of people sitting in front of someone or someone's house as a way of punishment. This way Sharers show they disagree with some kind of action or decision taken by the person being witnessed. Examples of witnessing can be found when Sharers sit in front of the traders' shops because traders do not want to stop

selling stones and gems to Sharers with stonesickness. Then, when the Valan army arrives, Sharers start practicing "witnessing" even with their babies until Valans throw them into the water or use gas against them. But perhaps the most common way of punishing a member of their society that has behaved in a non-desirable way is that of "unspeaking" a person: that is, they stop any contact with the unspoken person although she or he is given food and water to survive. There are several examples throughout the book in which a Sharer unspeaks another, but it is usually for a brief period of time. Unspeaking may become a lasting punishment if the person has committed a crime as murder or if she is stonesick. For example, we see in the novel that Lystra's first lover, Rilwen, is unspoken because Sharers think that this is a good method to heal stonesickness, although it does not work.

In her "Study Guide" to the novel, Joan Slonczewski comments that all pacifist behaviors portrayed in the novel are in fact based on historical events. The first non-violent behavior Slonczewski analyzes is that of disobedience and noncooperation. Sharers language lacks imperative forms so when Valan soldiers order them to do something, Sharers do not understand how someone can order another person to do something. For this reason, they do not behave as Valans expect them to and these situations usually culminate in the imprisonment of Sharers. Civil disobedience—as Henry David Thoreau entitled his essay on the issue in 1849—is a technique of noncooperation that according to Slonczewski has enjoyed some success throughout history, and she supports this view with the refusal of American colonists to pay taxes to Great Britain, or with the noncooperation of Eastern countries that wanted their independence from the Soviet Union back in the eighties ("Study Guide" n.p.). In fact, Slonczewski comments that she received a letter from a Czech student telling her that *a Door into Ocean* had been a great inspiration in their fight.

Slonczewski places physical and mental discipline as a second technique of non-violence. Sharers have developed a great physical and mental discipline with what they call "whitetrance." In whitetrance Sharers' bodies turn white little by little as their consciousness moves into a level in which they do not feel anything, and they are able to stay like that for a long time. Sharers go into whitetrance after a situation of suffering like the death of a beloved person or a great disappointment. The most interesting examples of whitetrance in the novel take place when Valans try to torture Sharers by getting into their minds with a Valan device called mind probe—a device that appears in other SF novels also. In fact some Sharers die when the Valan officer Jade tries to get information from their brains, because they just decide to part from their bodies. But being able to go into whitetrance involves training and only adults are able to do so—in fact, children are the only ones able to wake a Sharer from

whitetrance. The discipline that Sharers show when they go into whitetrance—during which they need to be fed—is similar, according to Slonczewski, to the discipline that Gandhi finds necessary to control one's spirit.

The third technique of non-violence that Slonczewski analyzes is that of resistance by women and children. As she comments, when soldiers face women and children resisting in a non-violent way, soldiers tend to feel empathy towards them because they tend to think of their own families. This resistance by women and children is seen in the novel in the practice of witnessing. Although at some point soldiers are told to open fire against the witnessers, some of them reject the idea and prefer to tell the women to go back to their rafts or to fire their guns at the sea thus avoiding casualties. Non-violent resistance was one of the techniques used by Gandhi and later by Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 60s while defending the Civil Rights movement. In the 70s, the Chipko movement also incorporated non-violent resistance when groups of women started hugging trees to avoid their felling. In recent decades environmentalists have also chosen non-violent resistance as a way to protest against deforestation or climate change.

The final non-violent practice Slonczewski explores in the Study Guide to the novel is leader replacement, a practice that has also been common in banned political parties and terrorist groups. She states that it is easier for non-violent movements to become successful when there is no single leader. This is because leaders are usually captured, thus leaving the movement without its head. Therefore, by sharing the leadership, the movement is able to resist for longer periods of time, as we can see in *ADIO*. Even if there is no leader among Sharers, some of them play more important roles because of their special ability to express themselves and Sharers' concerns. This is clearly the case of Merwen, who is called a "wordweaver." Although Merwen is not the leader of Sharers, Realgar thinks that she is an essential figure for the survival of the resistance movement on Shora. For this reason, when she is in prison, he is surprised at discovering that Sharers continue with their disobedience and their non-violent resistance (Slonczewsi, "Study Guide" n.p.). Then, decentralization of power is a key concept in this type of social movements because it enables its members to resist more time, thus weakening the other part.

Therefore, Sharers' non-violent behavior is inspired by actual examples of historical events as well as Gandhian doctrines and behaviors—inspired by Thoreau's writing. However, considering Sharers and their attitude towards life in general we have to take into account the importance of Quakerism in the novel, as well as in Slonczewski's other works, as she expressed in an interview: "My experience with the Quakers permeates everything I

write […]. In my books, wherever people resolve differences by intersecting seemingly irreconcilable views—that comes directly out of what I've seen among Quakers" (Schellenberg n.p.).

With this novel Slonczewski makes use of typical SF tropes to create a fruitful dialogue between self and *other*. Humanness and alienness are two concepts with which the author continually plays by shifting perspectives. Both Valans and Sharers see each other as the *other* but their attitude towards otherness is completely different. Whereas Valans refer to Sharers as animals and consider them inferior beings because of their lifestyle and their basic economy, Sharers wonder if Valans are human at all because of their violent behavior. Since Valans do not see Sharers as humans, they do not mind treating them with violence, a fact that implies that Valans are highly speciesist. In contrast, Sharers have a more biophilic attitude so that, even when they doubt Valans' humanness, they do not treat them as inferior beings. In fact, some Sharers propose that Valans should be taught to live a healthier life. Another interesting aspect of the interplay of assumptions and expectations is that Sharers, who seem such weak creatures, happen to be powerful civilization in terms of science—even though they prefer not to counter attack. In a similar way, the expectations concerning Valans are also disrupted because despite all their warfare and military forces, they are not able to win the war against Sharers, who adopt a non-resistant defensive attitude.

Throughout the novel, Slonczewski establishes a clear contrast between the two worlds she portrays. Valedon is a patriarchal world with fixed social structures and whose power lies in violence and in war. However, Shora is a female utopia whose inhabitants base their existence on respect towards other human beings as well as towards non-human creatures and the environment itself. These important differences result in a lack of understanding that is only solved thanks to the character of Spinel, who works as a kind of bridge between Valedon and Shora. Through Spinel's words and thoughts we can appreciate the process of successful adaptation from one world to the other. We see how he undergoes processes of alienation until he finally realizes the there is nothing wrong with being the *other* in a world where he is treated as any other Sharer.

Both Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* explore one of the main topics of SF: the encounter with difference. These two literary works analyze what it means to be the *other* by exploring the boundary between self and *other* and by questioning the dualism human/alien. The shifting perspectives in the narration of the two stories and the hybrid identities that appear in these texts challenge readers' assumptions of

gender, class and species. The two civilizations that clash in both novels help us reflect on the worst practices of human beings—usually related with violence and hierarchical behavior—but also on the alternative lifestyles portrayed by the authors, characterized by respect and environmentalism.

Readers can easily identify with both Butler's resister humans and Slonceswki's Valans because of the similarities between their civilizations and our own. By choosing two societies that mirror ours, the two authors invite us to question our values and our conceptual framework in contrast with the alternative ones presented in the Oankali and Sharer lifestyles. If we consider, for example, the different views on technology offered by the authors we notice a clear contrast between humans and aliens. On the one hand, resisters and Valans base their industry and their technology—and to some extent their economy—on the manipulation of inorganic materials like minerals or plastic. Since resisters try to live as they used to before the war, they build houses and factories. They also visit the ruins of old cities looking for plastic and other objects thay can use to imitate their old lifestyle. In a similar way, Valans' technology is based on stone and metal, the materials that their buildings and robots are made of. Stone is also symbolic in Valan culture since individuals wear stones or gems as necklaces to signal their profession or social status. Both resisters and Valans—as humans do nowadays—use inorganic materials to produce buildings, means of transport and everyday objects. On the other hand, Oankali and Sharers perform engage in biotechnology so that all their structures are made of organic materials. For example, the Oankali's spaceships and houses are made of an organic substance that is a mixture of plant and animal, and with which the aliens have established a symbiotic relationship. In the case of Sharers, their house-rafts are similar to hydroponic growings, and the "objects" they use in their lifeshaping rooms are vines and other plant-like creatures.

Therefore, there is a clear contrast between how resisters and Valans understand technology and how the Oankali and Sharers do; the first group manipulates inorganic materials for their own ends whereas the aliens use biotechnology—sometimes intertwined with symbiosis. One of the key aspects of this constast between two civilizations regarding technology is the consequences in terms of exhaustion and exploitation of resources. Resisters try to reuse objects they find in ruined cities, but their technology is grounded on the exploitation of natural resources. An example of this is the interest of Valans in the minerals that lie on the seabed of Shora because they think they can extract them to be sold later to those planets which have already exhausted their own minerals. Besides, many times the extraction of these minerals and the manipulation of certain inorganic materials entails

pollution and the productionof dangerous substances. This is the example of some plastic objects that resisters find in the jungle, and which surprise Akin because the resisters realize that they are dangerous for their health. However, the Oankali and Sharer's biotechnology does not entail pollutant by-products since the manipulation of organic substances is many times based on symbiotic relationships from which both parts benefit. Although Oankali and Sharers also use and manipulate natural resources, they do it in a sustainable way, thus avoiding exploitative practices.

Another important aspect regarding technology in the novels is how progress is perceived by the different societies. Resisters and Valans associate progress with a highly developed industry represented by complex structures and buildings and with scientific advances. In contrast, both the Oankali and Sharers understand progress in terms of sustainability, an idea that derives from their biotechnology. These different perceptions of progress create misunderstandings in the novels that lead readers to question our own concept of progress. For example, Tino wonders how the Oankali, being such an advanced society, can live in such simple houses made up of organic materials. Similarly, Valans find it difficult to believe that Sharers are a scientifically advanced society when they see their humble lifestyle. With these contrastive perceptions of technology both writers question the price of progress in our own world. If progress entails the destruction of natural resources and the pollution of the environment, then it could be understood as suicide and not as progress. This way Butler and Slonczweski question our idea of progress by asking us to reconsider it in terms of sustainability, since a species that bases its progress in the destruction of its habitat is doomed to extinction. For this reason, the two authors propose a new concept of progress that is based on respect and sustainability.

In relation to the idea of how humans understand progress without taking into account the consequences for the ecosystem, we need to analyze the idea of speciesism in both novels. Both resisters and Valans seem to feel a mixture of repulsion and curiosity for their alien counterparts—Oankali and Sharers. When the resisters are told that if they want to have children they will have to breed with the Oankali, they rebel against the aliens and start thinking of them as monsters. This hatred and repulsion is grounded on the Oankali's otherness but also on the fact that they take from humans their privileged position. Before the Oankali's arrival, humans considered themselves as the most evolved species, and thus, superior to the other creatures. But this speciesist view continues even after humans are placed in a subjugated position. In the case of Valans and Sharers, since both consider the other society as not-completely-human—Valans even refer to Sharers as animals—the

situation is more complex and there are cases of speciesism on both sides. But even if some Sharers and Valans are speciesist, they do not treat the *other* the same way. Whereas Sharers try to teach Valans how to share and to stop being violent, Valans hurt Sharers and torture them. But Sharers' speciesism seems limited because it only affects Valans and not the non-human creatures of Shora who are considered as equals and referred to as sisters. So, instead of speciesism, both the Oankali and Sharers defend a more biophilic view of the world, understanding the importance of all the members of an ecosystem, thus erasing all the power-over relations. Therefore, biophilia is a key aspect in the redefinition of progress so that is becomes sustainable. Only by understanding our place in the world, and how our actions may harm others, we can reinterpret progress in a more respectful and healthier way.

As we have seen, humans—resisters and Valans—and aliens—Oankali and Sharers—are two contrasting civilizations in terms of sustainability and cultural values. By presenting such opposing societies Butler and Slonczewski invite readers to reflect on our own species as compared to the ones portrayed in the novels. The similarities between our values and those of resisters and Valans are too many to be ignored, so we need to reflect on the weakness of humans, especially if they doom us to an unsustainable future. Oankali and Sharers are presented as opposites to their respective human-like counterparts, which enables us to see which human values should be preserved and which ones need to be redefined. But Butler and Slonczewski do not limit their works to the portrayal of the differences between Oankali and resisters, and Sharers and Valans, respectively; since the authors also offer a future for humans that is based on otherness and hybridity. In the first case, Butler envisions the future of human beings in hybrid children that represent the best values of humans and aliens. These children are characterized by their fluidity, since their appearance changes throughout their lifes—in the case of the ooloi, they can change it when they want to—and by their otherness, since they are descendants of two different species. These construct children inherit human intelligence, but also human feelings such as jealousy, anger and empathy—feelings that the Oankali seem unable to show. But the Oankali nature of this offspring enables them to leave behind hierarchical thought adopting a healthier lifestyle. In the second case, I think that Slonczewski uses Spinel to portray the conceptual shift humans need to perform. Although at the beginning of *ADIO* Spinel is somehow shocked by the otherness of Sharers and of Shora, he ends up realizing that their lifestyle and their values are more respectful and sustainable. With his decision of staying in Shora, Slonczewski is asking readers to reconsider our world in terms of progress and of environmentalism, by proposing a healthier and more sustainable model.

The humans and aliens portrayed in these novels are the vehicles used by Butler and Slonczewski to question readers—and humans in general—about our role in the world with respect to the so called *other*, and especially with the environment. By presenting resisters and Valans as doomed to extinction—if not physical, at least cultural—they want readers to reconsider the weakness and defects of humans as a species. In order to do so, they explore different ways of dealing with otherness, alternative—and more democratic—forms of government, and a more sustainable technology. Even though the Oankali and Sharers are depicted as utopian to some extent, they are presented as an alternative to our lifestyle. The pessimistic portrayal of the human-like societies is redeemed by the hope that both authors place on hybridity for human survival. On the one hand, Butler's construct children encompass the best physical attributes and cultural values of humans and the Oankali. On the other hand, Spinel's conceptual transformation and his hybridity as partly self/Valan and partly *other*/Sharer, enables him to understand that humans can only survive if they understand that their position in the world is one of embeddedness and not one of superiority.

5.6 ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS

Throughout the previous sections of this dissertation devoted to the analysis of *LB* and of *ADIO* issues such as gender, environmentalism or science have been explored individually. However, some of the ideas previously highlighted may also be considered from an ecofeminist perspective, thus enriching the analysis of the two novels. Both novels are interesting from an ecofeminist point of view since they portray the rigid hierarchical structures and oppressive attitudes that ecofeminists criticize, while also depicting societies whose values are based on respect and fluid social structures. One of the aims of ecofeminists is to end with the domination of those beings—human and non-human—labeled as *other*. In so doing, ecofeminists study the social structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression, understanding the historical, philosophical or biological justifications of these negative values. But ecofeminists are also interested in those texts that portray alternative conceptual frameworks based on respect and on healthier relationships with the so called *other*—including the environment.

For the ecofeminist literary analysis of *LB* and *ADIO*, I will mostly be referring to the ideas put forth by social ecofeminists Karen Warren and Val Plumwood, although other ecofeminists' works will also be mentioned. The number of ecofeminist critics and philosophers is large, but Warren and Plumwood offer in their writings a conciliatory tone that matches the plots of the two novels explored in this dissertation. In their writings, influenced by Murray Bookchin's idea of social ecology, these ecofeminist authors state that the differences between men and women cannot be used to place women in an inferior position. So, in order to end this subjugation, social ecofeminists propose to erase economic and social hierarchies so that women can participate in life on equal terms to men. Besides, and this is an important fact taking into account the type of novels under analysis, although some ecofeminisms reject science for its male bias and because of its implications in the mastery of nature, social ecofeminism defends the idea that the technology that has damaged the environment can be also used to preserve it (Bookchin 20). Therefore, social ecofeminism, and especially Warren's and Plumwood's works, will have an important role in the analysis of the following pages.

5.6.1 Ecofeminist Spiritualities

In her book *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, Karen Warren analyzes the idea of "ecofeminist spiritualities" stating that ecofeminism "is a movement toward healthy, life-enhancing, nourishing, restorative values, beliefs, practices, and systems" (*Ecofeminist* 198). Although these values represent the basis of the ecofeminist movement, Warren develops her idea of ecofeminist spiritualities analyzing the basic features an ecofeminist ethics should have. In this part of the analysis, the aim is to relate the features of an ecofeminist society—represented by what Warren calls ecofeminist spiritualities—with those of the Oankali and those of Sharers in order to see if their attitudes and values can be described as ecofeminist.

Warren starts defining the ecofeminist spiritualities as feminist because: "they express a commitment to the elimination of male-gender privilege and power over women in their myths, rituals, symbols, language, and value systems" (*Ecofeminist* 198). In the Oankali society it is impossible to talk about male-gender privilege because sex is divided into three different categories. Male, female and ooloi enjoy a similar position in the social structure of the Oankali without one sex being subjected to any of the other two. Although at some points in the novel readers may think the ooloi are somehow superior to both males and females, this supposed superiority is not established on the grounds of their sexual difference, but because of their ability to perform genetic engineering. Nevertheless, even if the ooloi are sometimes referred to as something like heads of the family, this position does not entail the domination or inferiorization of males and/or females, and that differentiates them from humans, who throughout their history have used sexual differences to justify the oppression of women. In this respect, we can conclude the the special status of the ooloi is determined by their special role in the Oankali society as the performers of genetic modifications and not because of their sexual status, but they do not take advantage of this position since the Oankali are a non-hierarchical society.

Another reason why the Oankali do not use gender categories as a tool of oppression is because the Oankali children are sexless until they go through a process of metamorphosis before reaching adulthood. Since the Oankali are sexless during their childhood, they are not subjected to a specific gender education. Although most countries nowadays offer the same educational subjects to both boys and girls, in the recent past girls were usually supposed to study household duties whereas boys were given a more complete education. With no sex until the metamorphosis, the Oankali children grow up in the same conditions receiving the

same education without any type of discrimination. When the Oankali go through their metamorphosis the sexual attributes appear, but even then the male and female bodies are quite similar. The only special difference between male and female Oankali is that females are usually larger than males, as it happens with some animals. The case of the ooloi is different since they have to undergo a second metamorphosis, and in the end their bodies differ from those of males and females because they grow more sensory organs.

Considering gender roles, there is no discrimination between male and female Oankali. Throughout the book we observe that male and female Oankali do not perform different tasks: both take care of the children and of their education, and both grow food and buildings when they travel to Earth. The only difference between male and female Oankali referred to in the novel is the female ability to give birth. Even though the female Oankali are the only ones who can have children, the experience of giving birth is not limited to females and those who help them. Just as ecofeminists empower feminine rituals, the Oankali make of birth an important event in which all the family members play a role. Although there is no danger of females of suffering complications during birthing—because of the presence of the ooloi—families accompany the female all through the process. During birth, the Oankali insist on having all the members of the family present because this way the child feels he/she/it is being born into a loving atmosphere, and that helps the baby grow in care and stability. Thus, the importance of the family, a value that has usually been defined as feminine, is also encouraged by the Oankali. With all the previous ideas we can conclude that the Oankali society is a feminist one in the sense that male and female enjoy the same rights and the same status in society. Feminist concerns as such are not expressed by the Oankali because there is no need to in a civilization in which there are no hierarchies. Therefore, no sex is privileged over another since that would entail inferiorization or subjugation, concepts that have no place in the Oankali value system.

Since Warren defines ecofeminist spiritualities as feminist, we have to point out the importance of feminism in *ADIO*, especially among the Sharers on Shora. Although there are some traders living on Shora, the native population of the planet is made up of women only. Besides, the importance of the female figure in the novel is such, that even the very name of the planet seems feminine. In fact, Sharers refer many times to Shora as if it was a living entity with feminine attributes: "Or, as children were told, sea and sky are the twin breasts of Shora, and the sun is the heart that beats behind them" (*ADIO* 85). Throughout the novel Shora is always described as full of life because of the number of creatures that inhabit its

waters. This description of Shora as a sea of life echoes the the idea of the ocean as the place where all life originated on Earth; but it is also significant if we see the ocean of Shora as a metaphor for the amniotic fluid in a womb, since both places are aquatic, nurturing, and full of life.

Femininity is also present in Sharer language, since it has evolved in a setting in which males are restricted to traders. For instance, whenever Sharers refer to another human being, they use the term "sister." Among themselves, even if there is no kinship, Sharers use the term "sister," but it becomes more noticeable when they use that same term to talk about men. When Spinel arrives at Shora, Lystra does not refer to him as sister but she uses the pejorative term, "malefreak." Lystra uses this word not because she hates him for being male but because she hates Valans in general. However, the concept "malefreak" gives readers an idea of the how language is shaped by social systems, especially in the novel, in which the contrast between Sharers and Valans is so evident. In our world, just as in Valedon, the term "men" is normally used when we talk about human beings in general, although political correctness in some languages favors the use of the term "human," as a way to avoid the sexist language that helps to perpetuate patriarchal structures in our society. However, in a non-patriarchal society as that of Sharers, there is no reason to use the term "man" as the norm, so they use the term "sister." This example of Sharer language exemplifies how our social and cultural backgrounds shape our language.

Moreover, feminine values and rituals are of special importance in Shora. Sharer economy is mainly based on the trade of medicines and seasilk products to the other planets. On the one hand hand, medicines are produced by lifeshapers, Sharers with a special knowledge of genetics and chemistry. Lifeshapers thus encompass both the typical figure of the nurturing woman as a nurse or caretaker, but also that of a scientist/doctor—jobs typically ascribed in SF to male characters. This way, lifeshapers break down the barrier that in many SF works has limited the roles of women to that of the male protagonist's daughter/girlfriend/prize. But lifeshapers may also work as metaphors for the traditional character of the witch or the healer, that is, women with powers—or abilities—who are seen with suspicion because they are able to heal diseases that other cannot. On the other hand, Sharers trade with seasilk products they knit. The image of the knitting woman is also a typical and ancient one, and its most representative figure is Penelope while waiting Odysseus's return to Ithaca. However, the idea of passivity that is present in Penelope does not appear in Sharers, since apart from knitting they perform other typically masculine tasks such as building or hunting. Therefore, Sharers are representative of historical feminine tasks

and duties while combining them with more masculine roles, which challenges the assumption that certain jobs or roles are gendered.

In her description of the ecofeminist spiritualities, Karen Warren posits that in second place, ecofeminist spiritualities are "*spiritualities*" because "they express faith in a life-affirming (rather than life-denying) power or presence (energy, force, being, deity or deities, God or Goddess) other than and in addition to one's own individual ego" (*Ecofeminist* 198). The Oankali do not practice any type of religion or spiritual cult, though we can deduce from their practices a kind of faith in life in itself. In general, the Oankali praise life and living organisms by finding beauty in even the smallest organism. Besides, their very nature forces them to protect life even if it involves the loss of autonomy and freedom in others, as in the case of humans in the novel. In fact, the Oankali describe their urge for preserving life as a biological need, since their bodies are able to store genetic information as well as to modify it. Therefore, the praise of life becomes both a biological and spiritual trait in the Oankali.

Even though we cannot talk about a religious faith in the Oankali, there are several examples throughout the novel that prove that the aliens think of life as a superior entity they have to respect and protect. One of the most powerful instances in which the Oankali confirm this life-affirming attitude is whenever they face a situation that forces them to fight back. When some members of the first group of awakened humans rebel violently against the Oankali, the aliens reject the idea of killing the humans—something they could do with the slightest touch of their tentacles—because killing another living organism would cause them pain: "When they killed even to save life, they died a little themselves" (*LB* 564). This ability to feel others' pain is closely related to the particular anatomy of the aliens' bodies and the tentacles with which they link themselves with other organisms, as Lilith explains: "They hook into our nervous systems somehow. They're more sensitive than we are. Anything we feel a little, they feel a lot, and they feel it almost before we're conscious of it. That helps them stop doing anything painful before we notice that they've begun" (*LB* 169). Although in some parts of the novel the Oankali treat humans in a despotic way—especially with the sterilization and the genetic manipulation without consent—, the aliens are described as sensitive creatures on biological and chemical levels. Therefore, because of this special type of sensitivity, the Oankali are able to carefully control their response in dangerous and violent situations.

Apart from the Oankali pacifist nature, born out of their sensitivity when hurting another creature, the aliens also support life-affirming behaviors when encountering health

problems. Once the Oankali rescue the surviving humans from Earth, the aliens put them in suspended animation for a long time, in which they learn about human biology and anatomy, but also about their culture and values. While investigating human anatomy, the Oankali heal cancers and any serious disease they find in humans. But their interest in healing humans is also present later in the novel when they offer their help to resisters, especially those with degenerative disorders that need to be monitored, without expecting anything in exchange. However, most resisters consider that if they allow the Oankali to heal them, they will be under the control of the aliens. But the Oankali want to help sick humans because they receive pleasure in doing so—just as they receive any harm they cause physically:

> There's no pain. They hate pain more than we do, because they're more sensitive to it. If they hurt us, they hurt themselves. And there are no harmful side effects. Just the opposite. They automatically fix any problems they find. They get real pleasure from healing or regenerating, and they share that pleasure with us. (*LB* 294)

The Oankali need to heal health problems when they face them because it is a physiological necessity for them, similar to eating for humans. In fact, they obtain pleasure from healing or regenerating just like humans do when they eat after being hungry. In a way, their healing practices may be considered a symbiotic process since they receive pleasure from them, but also the other organism receives the benefit of being healed. Therefore, and as we have seen in other sections, the relationships between the Oankali and other species tend to be of a symbiotic nature—although consent is not present in all of them.

Throughout the novel we can see several examples of the healing practices carried out by the Oankali, like the extirpation of Lilith's cancer at the beginning of the story. Although the Oankali heal any disease they find, they have a special interest in cancer because they can use cancer cells to regrow lost limbs. Even though we cannot talk about faith or religion, the Oankali spiritual and natural worlds are linked by their ability—and necessity—to heal others. Therefore, we can identify in the Oankali some kind of life-affirming power or force that is part of the very nature and that forces them to defend life whenever it is in peril.

Regarding ecofeminist spiritualities as spiritualities in the context of *ADIO*, we also find that even though Sharers do not practice any religion, they are quite aware of the presence of life around them—as in the case of the Oankali. As commented previously, for Sharers the planet Shora is a living entity because in its waters coexist thousands of different species. By exploring the relationship between Sharers and the environment, we could relate the figure of Shora to that of Gaia in the sense that the planet is considered a kind of deity that

perpetuates life. Throughout the novel there are several examples of how Shora is considered a living presence and referred to as a "sea of life" (*ADIO* 259). Similarly, there are examples in which the capacity of Shora to welcome life is highlighted: "A school of flying fish spurted across the sea and made a playful froth in the distance. From her seat in the rowboat, Merwen stretched her neck and watched their beauty, their dance that was a song in praise of life" (*ADIO* 263).

Apart from the portrayal of Shora as a living entity whose capacity to give life is praised by Sharers, the belief in a life-affirming power is also expressed in other ways. Sharers think that life is a series of cycles they refer to as "doors." The last of these doors is death itself and although they understand what it means, they are not afraid of dying because they think it is an essential part of the cycle of life (*ADIO* 102). In the novel we can see how some Sharers in whitetrance prefer to cross the last door rather than having their minds broken. For example, when Nisi is practicing whitetrance for the first time, she realizes that in that state, death is just a small step farther, and by realizing this she starts considering death as something natural. But in spite of not being afraid of death, Sharers celebrate and defend life to the extent that there are almost no murders in their society. In fact, the idea of murder is not part of their culture, so their language lacks this verb and they use the periphrastic expression "to hasten death."

One last interesting aspect of Sharers regarding the idea of life and death is their relationship with "dead" materials like stone. Inorganic beings provoke in Sharers a mixture of discomfort and curiosity that may result very dangerous. Because Sharers are used to inhabiting an ecosystem where life is everywhere, they are unable to understand how there can be entities that have never contained life. For some Sharers, stones do not provoke a feeling of rejection but rather a voracious curiosity that makes them become obsessed, and then alienated from their society as other Sharers unspeak them in order to help them. But once Sharers understand the composition of stones, and that their components can be arranged in other ways to produce living organisms, they leave their fear behind. Therefore, we can see several ways in which praising life is part of Sharer society in their beliefs, routines and their interaction with the environment.

In third place, Karen Warren states that ecofeminist spiritualities are "*ecofeminist:* They express a twofold commitment to challenge harmful women, other-human Others-nature interconnections and to develop earth-respectful, care-sensitive practices toward humans and earth others" (*Ecofeminist* 198). According to these words, ecofeminism has two main goals:

to question the oppressive patterns that have placed the *other*—women, other human Others, and nature—in a subjugated position; and to end this domination of the *other* by developing an ethics of care based on respect towards earth others. In the relationship of the Oankali with the *other*, we can perceive the aliens' attraction for what is different. Instead of using otherness to justify oppressive attitudes, the Oankali see difference as something they can learn from. For this reason, these aliens are unable to understand situations of oppression as those that some women and construct children are subjected to in the hands of certain groups of resisters. For the Oankali, these situations are the consequence of hierarchical thought, a human trait that is not present in the genetic code of the construct children born out of the trade.

The third feature of ecofeminist spiritualities also focuses on the idea of developing earth-respectful practices. In this sense, the Oankali are portrayed as a civilization very much concerned with the degradation and misuse of the natural world. Most of the analysis about the role of the environment in the novel has already been developed in the section of the dissertation devoted to that issue, so in this exploration of the ecofeminist spiritualities, I will briefly refer to some of the ideas previously stated. Regarding the environment, since the Oankali are always travelling across the universe, they need to be particularly aware of their dependence on the place they inhabit. In the first part of *LB*, the Oankali and the surviving humans live in Chkahichdahk, a spaceship that physically resembles a planet because it is made of organic matter. This dependence between the alien civilization and their habitat makes them aware of the necessity of establishing a respectful relationship with the spaceship-planet because their survival depends on it. Another reason why the Oankali are so aware of the needs of their ecosystem is their ability to feel any harm they cause. Since they receive any pain they produce, whenever they make any modification in the environment, they do it with much care and taking into account possible consequences. Besides, at some points in the novel we can see that the Oankali understand their relationship with the spaceship more as a symbiotic one since they believe that both serve each other's needs. The relationship the Onakali establish with the ecosystem when they travel to Earth is quite similar to the one they had with the spaceship, since they live in the same kind of organic structures they grow in the spaceship.

The Sharers of *ADIO* are also representative of those earth-respectful, care-sensitive practices that ecofeminists propose. Since they believe that all life forms are interconnected in the web of Shora, and that all of them have a role to play in the equilibrium of the ecosystem,

they realize that the only possibility of survival is to treat other creatures—human and non-human—with respect and understanding. For this reason, Sharers are quite respectful with each other but also with the non-human animals with which they share Shora.

As commented previously, the description of Shora as a network of living creatures that participate in safeguarding the equilibrium of the ecosystem echoes Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. Both Shora and Gaia have a dual nature: they are planets but at the same time they represent a superior being that works as a network for the inferior beings, among which we would place humans. The idea of the network is pervasive in the novel, as when we see how Sharers realize that their survival depends on the survival of lesser beings they have to take care of. Therefore, the idea of equilibrium in an ecosystem is essentially based on the recognition of the interdependence and interconnection of the members of that ecosystem. In his Gaia hypothesis, James Lovelock comments on this interconnectedness of life but from a scientific point of view, implying that the Earth is able to heal itself from pollution and other human harming practices. In Slonczewski's novel, nonetheless, the well-being of the planet is not something Sharers take for granted. Although their manipulation of the ecosystem may be controversial, as we will see later in this analysis, they understand that the stability of an ecosystem depends on how all its elements work together for that purpose. This idea is closely related with the ecofeminist notion of the interconnectedness of living beings and that what happens to some of them may affect the whole world.

Since Sharers perfectly understand that their own survival, and that of the planet, depends on the survival of the other creatures that inhabit Shora, they defend their lives even if doing so puts them in danger. The most terrible creatures that live in Shora are the seaswallowers, and it is precisely those creatures that Valans try to kill with their pests. Seaswallowers, which may be described as a kind of squid, travel across Shora twice a year destroying everything on their way, including rafts and Sharers alike. With their vast knowledge of chemistry and genetics, Sharers would find it very easy to modify the cycles of seaswallowers by releasing in the ocean some substance that would prevent the squids from undertaking their dangerous cycles, just as Valans do upon their arrival. However, and even taking into account that their lives are at risk, Sharers refuse to do anything that could damage the stability of the planet.

After analyzing the Oankali and Sharers' lifestyles following the features of ecofeminist spiritualities, we can conclude that both alien species can be described as ecofeminist if we consider their values, their treatment of otherness and their relationship with

the environment. One of the reasons why the lifestyles of both alien societies can be related to ecofeminist principles is their lack of hierarchical thought, which implies the absence of power-over relations. Similarly, their belief in the interconnectedness of life and in the interdependence of species enables them to develop more respectful relationships with the environment—in the case of the Oankali they are usually described as symbiotic—as well as more sustainable lifestyles.

But despite the ecofeminist qualities of both the Oankali and Sharers, we need to consider also their ambiguities and contradictions for a complete analysis of both novels. For example, in Grewe-Volpp's study of *LB* from an ecofeminist perspective, she comments that the Oankali could be considered ecofeminists because

> The Oankali world represents many ecofeminist ideals. The strange beings live in harmony with their environment, they form a symbiotic community with their spaceships, they live ecologically responsible lives, have a strong sense of communal values without strictly defined gender roles, and they are unhierarchical and nonviolent, at least among themselves. (Grewe-Volpp 159)

But later on she comments that even though the Oankali are non-hierarchical among themselves, their attitude towards humans cannot be described in such terms. In fact, Grewe-Volpp refers to the situation of humans among the aliens as a "dystopian nightmare" (166). The main reason why she considers that humans suffer under the aliens' rule is because they are not able to understand the "human need for autonomy and self-determination" (166). Therefore, even though the Oankali can be described as representative of some ecofeminist values, some of their behaviors problematize the categorization of their society. In a similar way, Sharers' ability to perform genetic engineering may be controversial if we consider how they manipulate certain organisms for their own benefit. Although the ambiguities of Sharers' practices regarding ecofeminist values are not as numerous as those of the Oankali, the contradictions of both civilizations deserve further comment.

5.6.2 Ecofeminist ambiguities

Imprisonment and animalization

Among the practices that make readers wonder to what extent the Oankali are a utopian society, we can find examples of imprisonment and animalization. One of the characters that undergoes some of these oppressive behaviors is Lilith, and it is precisely the first part of the novel the one which shows the greater number of examples of this type of practices. At the beginning of the book, Lilith awakes and discovers she is locked up in some

sort of room that makes her think of it as a prison. Most of the time Lilith spends in that room she is completely alone and being observed—and sometimes talked to—by the Oankali. At some point a little boy is put into her room, and even though at first they do not talk to each other, she ends up teaching him some words until he is taken away. When later in the novel Lilith wonders why she has been left so alone she is told that whenever humans were put together, they always ended trying to harm each other and even themselves:

> We didn't know what to think when some of your people killed themselves. Some of us believed it was because they had been left out of the mass suicide – that they simply wanted to finish the dying. Others said it was because we kept them isolated. We began putting two or more together, and many injured or killed one another. Isolation cost fewer lives. (*LB* 18)

The Oankali explain that when some humans started to commit suicide, they thought those humans regretted having survived the mass suicide. Thus, the Oankali believed that humans provoked the nuclear war knowing its consequences because they had decided to end life on Earth. For this reason, they explain that at first they thought not to rescue the survivors, though they changed their minds because they could not allow themselves to waste such potential lives. Although the idea of humans fighting a nuclear war in order to commit suicide may seem absurd, if we position ourselves as external observers we may reach the same conclusion since human beings are aware of the consequences of using nuclear weapons.

The Oankali explain that at first humans were isolated, but they started to commit suicide. Then, they decided to put humans together, but they started to kill each other, which forced the Oankali to isolate them once more. This may be interpreted as a limited view on human behavior since the Oankali should have taken into account the anguish and despair that stem from not knowing where or with whom they are. Although Lilith explains that humans are social creatures that need to be with other members of their species, she ends up noticing that violence is inherent to human nature: "An increasing number of bored, caged humans could not help finding destructive things to do" (*LB* 147). With these words, Lilith seems to echo Octavia Butler's lack of hope in humanity because of their violent nature. In spite of such a negative view, readers can easily identify with the imprisoned humans and with their dystopian situation.

The idea of humans caged for long periods of time echoes the situation of certain animals. Besides, if we consider that these humans are being observed and controlled—and sometimes even medically examined—their animalization becomes even more evident. Throughout the novel there are several situations in which the protagonists—and especially Lilith at the beginning of the novel—compare their situation to that of animals. For example,

despite being perfectly fed and finding herself in a comfortable place, Lilith feels herself trapped: "She imagined herself to be in a large box, like a rat in a cage" (*LB* 7). Once Lilith is allowed to go outside her room because the Oankali think she is prepared to face reality, she starts feeling fear: "She was retreating into her cage—like a zoo animal that had been shut up for so long time that the cage had become home" (*LB* 30). As in the previous example, in which Lilith compares herself with a rat, she identifies once more with animals. In a way, this identification may be the product of her inferior situation in contrast with the Oankali, who control her completely. Besides, the "cage" had become a comfortable and safe place as opposed to the unknown world she will have to face once she abandons her prison/home.

After being freed, Lilith goes to live with Jdahya—the Oankali who had been her contact—and with his family. During this time, she is asked to spend as much time as possible with one of the children of the family, Nikanj—who is going to become ooloi after his metamorphosis—because this way they can learn from each other. For this reason, Lilith and Nikanj become almost inseparable since the beginning of the novel, although they have some difficult moments at the beginning:

> Nikanj's friends poked and prodded her exposed flesh and tried to persuade her through Nikanj to take off her clothing. None of them spoke English. None seemed in the least childlike, though Nikanj said all were children. She got the feeling some would have enjoyed dissecting her. They spoke aloud very little, but there was much touching of tentacles to flesh or tentacles to other tentacles. When they saw that she would not strip, no more questions were addressed to her. She was first amused, then annoyed, then angered by their attitude. She was nothing more than an unusual animal to them. Nikanj's new pet. (*LB* 57)

Although at first Lilith finds Nikanj's friends amusing, she is then annoyed when she understands that for them she is nothing but Nikanj's pet. This process of animalization scares her, because she realizes that these Oankali children do not consider her feelings, the same way humans had treated animals on Earth: "She discovered she was trembling and took deep breaths to relax herself. How was a pet supposed to feel? How did zoo animals feel?" (*LB* 58). The interesting aspect of Lilith's identification with animals is that at first she thinks of the Oankali as more similar to animals than to human beings—neglecting the fact that humans are animals themselves. But as the novel progresses, she realizes that if the Oankali are in control, it is her position, and that of all humans, which can be compared to animals, as inferior creatures. However, this view is limited and speciesist since we start from the premise that animals have a lower status than humans. Although Lilith's words imply that humans had treated animals as inferior beings, she also questions this by wondering the feelings of those caged, manipulated and exhibited non-human animals. By identifying Lilith with pets and zoo animals, Butler hints at the idea that non-human animals may be able to have feelings and that

possibly situations that seem normal for humans may have caused suffering to certain creatures. This way, she makes readers question our attitude and treatment of pets, and the lives of animals in zoos.

In the case of *ADIO*, the examples of imprisonment and animalization that we can find are those in which Sharers are the victims. The situation of Spinel among Sharers cannot be understood in terms of imprisonment since he is the one who choses to go with them, and he is told that he is free to leave whenever he wants to—as he does when he learns about the presence of soldiers in his hometown. In fact, Sharers would be unable to imprison someone since that would entail imposing their will on someone, an idea—that of forcing someone to do something—which does not exist in Sharer culture.

The examples of imprisonment in *ADIO* take place with the arrival of the Valan army on Shora. After learning of Sharers' lifeshaping rooms, scientists supported by the army start inspecting them, sometimes facing the non-violent resistance of Sharers in the form of whitetrance. Once a Valan scientist tells the army officer Realgar that the whole planet is a laboratory due to the vast number of lifeshaping rooms, he informs his superior of the dangers Sharers pose, so he asks for more soldiers. Sharers start to be imprisoned and some of them even die when the officer Jade tries a mindprobe on them while they remain unconscious in whitetrance. With the arrival of the complete army, the situation becomes even tenser and many Sharers are imprisoned and tortured to get information. Some Sharers are even sent to Valedon to be exposed in cages as if they were violent animals.

As we can see, the oppressive and controlling behavior of Valans on Shora is the consequence of their fear of what Sharers are capable of. Although they know that their scientific discoveries could wipe Valans off the planet, Sharers refuse to take any action. In fact, when Nisi decides on her own to attack the Valan headquearter, she does so with explosives taken from Valedon and not using Sharers' biotechnology. The treatment to which Sharers are subjected during their imprisonment is completely inhuman since they suffer from hunger and from physical damages: "And adults had returned, too, in far worse shape than the children. They were deformed almost beyond recognition" (*ADIO* 317). For example, the consequences of the tortures can be found in Lystra when she is freed and Merwen is watching her in the lifeshaping room: "The hands fixed her gaze, Lystra's fingers with the webbing so badly ripped between each that Lystra would not swim for a long time" (*ADIO* 317).

The abuses to which Sharers are subjected are justified by Valans with the arguments that they are a dangerous enemy, something they cannot prove since Sharers oppose Valans in a non-violent way. Besides, Valans imprison both adults and children—although the latter are not mistreated—creating a discomforting situation among soldiers, who start feeling empathy for the inhabitants of Shora. Realgar and Jade do not hesitate to torture and mistreat Sharers because they do not see them as human beings but just as non-human animals. By hyperseparating from them, the officers exert oppressive and violent practices such as burning Sharers alive—thus reinforcing the image of these women as witches because of their unknown powers. The abuses and tortures that Sharers suffer make readers reflect on how still nowadays many people are still deprived of their basic rights. Slonczewski also makes us question animal abuse since Valans consider Sharers as a non-human animal species.

The concepts of imprisonment and animalization are related to some extent in *ADIO*. From the beginning of the novel Sharers are described as strange creatures, and most of the times they are pejoratively referred to as catfish, and even at first Spinel focuses on their different appearance. The traders who live on Shora also think of Sharers as catfish, even though they meets them and talk to them frequently. When one of these traders finds Spinel protesting at the front of his shop, he calls him: "Catfish-lover" (*ADIO* 107). The trader is surprised at Spinel's purplish-blue skin and even tells him that if he continues among Sharers he will "sprout gills and a tail before long" (*ADIO* 107), despite the fact that Sharers do not have gills nor tail. By seeing Sharers as non-human animals, Valans find it easier to control and abuse them.

Although it is not a case of animalization as such, Sharers' description of Valans as sick children can fit into this category. The main difference between the animalization of Sharers and the categorization of Valans as children is that whereas Valans abuse them, Sharers try to share healing with Valans because these women think that there may be hope. In fact, Spinel is at first seen as a sick child until he evolves and Sharers consider him one more sister. Nisi is a similar example since, despite her Valan origins, she adopts Sharer values and becomes a sister with her own self-name. The reason why Merwen and Usha travel to Valedon is to investigate if Valans can be considered human. But this question of humanness is not related with physical appearance but with cultural values and lifestyles, as Usha explains: "I tell you, Valan genes can mingle with ours. We are one species. So what if some of them have fur and claws? Their mind structure is not just similar; it *is* ours" (*ADIO* 77; emphasis in original). Other Sharers like Yinevra are quite skeptical with Valans, since they have seen Valans attack each other and even some Sharers; they think they behave like

children that have to be taught: "They're excitable, and very fearful. Like a newly hatched squid—ink first, think next" (*ADIO* 77). Even though Spinel illustrates that Valans can live according to Sharer values, after the invasion Sharers break all contact with Valedon.

Manipulation

Throughout *LB* we can see how the Oankali treat humans in a way that resembles how humans have treated other humans or non-human animals. The most obvious case is the identification of Lilith with animals, when she feels the Oankali have animalized her (see p. 239). There are other examples in which we can notice that certain Oankali behaviors towards humans are quite similar to the way humans have treated those labeled as the *other:* women, ethnic minorities, animals, and even nature. At the basis of the Oankali practices that will be analyzed in the paragraphs below, we can find a total lack of understanding between individuals and/or between species that lead to a complete absence of empathy. Just as humans think non-human animals are unable to express themselves or to feel the way humans do, the Oankali do not take into account human needs such as free-will or consent. This lack of empathy often results in suffering in the case of humans while the Oankali are unable to understand why they feel so—as in the case of isolation mentioned before.

One of the Oankali practices that we can describe as controversial is the healing of certain diseases. The Oankali very nature forces them to protect life and for this reason they usually heal any disease they can identify in a body. However, this is a controversial issue since many of these healing processes take place while humans are in suspended animation. Even if the Oankali heal humans for their own good, Lilith complains about the procedures and the lack of information: "It scares me to have people doing things to me that I don't understand" (*LB* 33). Lilith thinks the intrusive methods of the Oankali affect her very identity, since she has been manipulated to become someone/something else.

Informed consent is one of the main issues when we talk about experimentation, and it is also one of the main topics in the novel. When Lilith is not asked for her consent in the case of the cancer removal—and similar situations appear later in the novel—, she becomes an animal whose consent is not necessary. Although most people would argue that since animals are not rational creatures they cannot give their consent, Lilith questions if that is enough reason to experiment with them. Even though non-human animals are unable to give their consent they can feel the confusion of having their body invaded by external elements. In the case of human beings, this issue becomes more problematic:

> She was intended to live and reproduce, not to die. Experimental animal, parent to domestic animals? or... nearly extinct animal, part of a captive breeding program? Human biologists had done that before the war—used a few captive members of an endangered animal species to breed more for the wild population. Was that what she was headed for? Forced artificial insemination. Surrogate motherhood? Fertility drugs and forced "donations" of eggs? Implantation of unrelated fertilized eggs. Removal of children from mothers at birth...Humans had done these things to captive breeders—all for a higher good, of course. (*LB* 60)

When Lilith thinks of the possible experiment the Oankali could perform on humans, she just thinks about things humans had done both to one another and to non-human animals in the past, identifying herself with "captive member of an endangered animal species."

The idea of manipulation in relation to reproduction is one of the most important ones in the novel. Before Lilith learns about the gene trade the Oankali propose humans and its consequences for both species, she is allowed to meet another human, Paul Titus. Paul had been awakened some time before Lilith so he had lived among the Oankali most of his life. When they are left alone to talk, he starts to explain her what the Oankali had done to some humans, making real some of Liliths' fears concerning reproduction:

> He shook her abruptly. "You know how many kids I got? They say, 'Your genetic material has been used in over seventy children.' And I've never seen a woman in all the time I've been here."
>
> He stared at her for several seconds and she feared him and pitied him and longed to be away from him. The first human being she had seen in years and all she could do was long to be away from him. (*LB* 94-95)

Titus explains to Lilith that his genetic material has been used to impregnate women he would never know, which creates in him a feeling of anguish that drives him to try to rape Lilith. In order to justify his behavior he says that his behavior is what the Oankali expected from humans: "Animals get treated like this. Put a stallion and a mare together until they mate, then send them back to the owners. What do they care? They're just animals!" (*LB* 95). In this case it is not Lilith but Paul who thinks of the situation of humans as similar to that of animals when they are put together to breed. Later in the novel, she is told that Paul had not been chosen to go to Earth because he preferred to stay in the spaceship, where the Oankali needed humans in order to produce children—due to the low number of rescued humans.

But the Oankali manipulation of human bodies is not limited to the extirpation of tumors, healing of diseases or breeding programs. When Lilith is told about her cancer, she is also explained that while humans are kept in suspended animation, their bodies are studied by the Oankali so that they can learn from them. Before Lilith learns about the techniques the ooloi use—mainly contact with their special sensory organs—she imagines humans suffering different tortures in the name of scientific experimentation. The experiments Lilith imagines

are based on actual human behaviors that differ to a great extent from the actual scientific methods of the Oankali, which, despite their invasiveness, are neither harmful nor painful.

Although the way the Oankali study, manipulate and/or experiment with human bodies does not entail torture or suffering, it is completely intrusive. With their sensory organs, the ooloi hook into the nervous system and once there they operate by making genetic changes or segregating certain chemical substances. This intrusive method, together with the fact that some of the interventions take place without the consent of the patient, may be in itself considered a form of colonization. For example, Rachel Stein points out that for Vandana Shiva the "biogenetic and medical manipulation of humans, plants, and animals are new forms of colonization that have now extended the ruinous exploitation of the planet *inward*" (Stein 210; emphasis in original). Therefore, the colonization of humans by the Oankali is reinforced through these genetic modifications, even if they are performed for their health or for a higher good.

Regarding the different ways the Oankali manipulate humans, sterilization becomes the main issue in the novel. From the beginning of the novel, humans are told that they have a genetic flaw that makes them a species doomed to extinction:

> "Your bodies are fatally flawed. The ooloi perceived this at once. At first it was very hard for them to touch you. Then you became an obsession with them. Now it's hard for them to let you alone."
>
> "What are you talking about?"
>
> "You have a mismatched pair of genetic characteristics. Either alone would have been useful, would have aided the survival of your species. But the two together are lethal. It was only a matter of time before it destroyed you."
>
> […]
>
> "You are intelligent," he said."That's the newer of the two characteristics, and the one you might have put to work to save yourselves. You are potentially one of the most intelligent species we've found, though your focus is different from ours. Still, you had a good start in the life sciences, and even in genetics."
>
> "What's the second characteristic?"
>
> "You are hierarchical. That's the older and more entrenched characteristic. We saw it in your closest animal relatives and in your most distant ones. It's a terrestrial characteristic. When human intelligence served it instead of guiding it, when human intelligence did not even acknowledge it as a problem, but took pride in it or did not notice it at all..." The rattling sounded again. "That was like ignoring cancer. I think your people did not realize what a dangerous thing they were doing." (*LB* 39)

Although the Oankali praise humans for their intelligence, they criticize its use for hierarchical thought. Hierarchies as such are useful for organization, but hierarchical thought becomes a problem when it entails a power-over relation between those members on the upper levels of the hierarchies and those on the lowest ones. Besides, intelligence had not stopped humans from being hierarchical; instead, it had encouraged hierarchical thought by denying the intrinsic danger of this way of conceiving the world. Therefore, intelligence is

presented as a good feature but with fatal consequences if misused, just as Jdahya says: "Intelligence does enable you to deny facts you dislike" (*LB* 39).

It is interesting to note that one of the reasons why humans are doomed to extinction is their intelligence. For centuries, humans have positioned themselves over other creatures using intelligence, and their ability to reason, to justify their position of power. However, even if the Oankali praise humans for their intelligence, they also comment that it has been misused. In the novel, readers are told how humans have used their intelligence to think of possible ways of exterminating other humans, as well as to exploit nature for their own purposes. This way, the novel shows that intelligence is not a justification for the privileged position humans have enjoyed in relation with animals. In fact, intelligence should have guided humans to a greater ecological awareness so that they would have understood their real role in the ecosystem, such as Ruether highlights:

> The more complex forms of life are not the source and foundation of the less complex forms, just the opposite. An animal depends on a whole ecological community of life processes of plants, insects, other animals, water, air, and soil that underlie its existence. Still more, human beings cannot live without the whole ecological community that supports and makes possible our existence. The privilege of intelligence, then, is not a privilege to alienate and dominate the world without concern for the welfare of all other forms of life. On the contrary, it is the responsibility to become the caretaker and cultivator of the welfare of the whole ecological community upon which our existence depends. (88-89)

With these words, ecofeminist Rosemary Radford Ruether acknowledges that since humans are intelligent, they should become especially careful in their treatment of the other inhabitants of the world. Ruether also comments that instead of being aware of their role in the ecosystem, humans had used the privilege of their intelligence "to alienate and dominate the world" without taking into account the existence of plants and of non-human animals, a view portrayed by Butler in the novel.

Therefore, the Oankali offer a pessimistic portrayal of humans, who seem to be condemned because of their genes. However, the Oankali say the flaw can be corrected if they breed hybrid children, choosing the best features of each species. Looking for the reason why the novel gives such a negative view of human beings it is necessary to acknowledge the author's words. Octavia Butler declared herself that although *LB* is a SF novel that talks about alien civilizations and a post-apocalyptic Earth, she had found inspiration in the real world and in the attitude of some people with respect to the use of nuclear warfare. For this reason, she uses the alien encounter of the novel to explore the flaws, whether cultural or genetic, of human beings and how these could be solved.

Whether we believe or not in the "Human contradiction" the Oankali describe, the explanation given by the aliens is quite clear and even convincing. The "Human contradiction" is used to justify the practices the Oankali perform on humans: since the aliens believe humans are genetically flawed, they decide to sterilize humans as a preventive measure. However, the sterilization process is reversed in those humans who decide to join the Oankali to breed hybrid children without the dangerous traits in their genes. Although this measure is clearly explained by the Oankali, the sterilization produces great anguish in the human resisters, who see themselves as a dying species unable to survive through their descendants—at least until Akin offers them the colony in Mars. As in the case of medical experimentation, sterilization in the novel is performed for the higher good, something that mirrors again certain human practices in the field, like sterilization of disabled people or eugenicist practices, to the extreme of extermination of ethnic groups. Nevertheless, in the case of the Oankali the sterilization may be completely reversed once the genetic trade is accepted. At this point we could wonder why such an ecofeminist civilization would behave in such an intrusive and colonizing way. Rachel Stein offers a quite simple answer: "the novel explores the premise that if human behavior is genetically determined, then genetic manipulation is the best means of shaping behavior, and forcible control of sexuality/reproduction is justified by the need for species evolution" (211).

Then, we have seen that even if the Oankali may be considered ecofeminist according to some of their practices, there are some other aspects that make readers wonder to what extent they represent a utopian society. Although the Oankali society may be described as utopian, their treatment of humans is rather dystopian if we take into account the scientific experiments, the sterilization process or the genetic manipulations in general. We have to take into account that Butler starts the novel from the premise that human beings as a species have failed since they have destroyed not only almost all the members of the species, but also their habitat and the other living forms of the Earth. Therefore, the Oankali do not carry out their genetic manipulation as a way of torture or of experimentation, but as a way of healing humans of lethal diseases while performing certain operations for the "higher good," that is the survival of humanity by eliminating the dangerous traits that make humans a species doomed to extinction.

Since both the Oankali and Sharers are scientifically advanced civilizations with a deep knowledge of genetics, we can expect the issue of manipulation to be present in both novels. In the Sharer society—as with the Oankali—nature and culture are presented as the

same thing, which is related to the fact that Sharers understand the world through science. Even those Sharers who do not devote their lives to lifeshaping have a deeper scientific knowledge that most of us, especially in the field of biochemistry. Living in an ocean moon surrounded by living organisms, the way Sharers understand their reality is through science and biotechnology. But in the scientific research that Sharers carry out, there are some ambiguities that we need to consider in terms of manipulation: "are they truly non-disruptive participants in their ecosystems, or are they the ultimate genetic regulators of their world?" (Slonczewski and Levy 184). Their belief in the interconnectedness of all living creatures prevents Sharers from meddling with the ecosystem, since their actions might have negative consequences—as it happens when Valans create a plague to repel seaswallowers or an air pest to kill the clickflies Sharers use as a means of communication. But in spite of Sharers' fear of manipulating the environment, some of their practices interfere with the ecosystem for their own sake.

Jane Donawerth points out that even though Sharers' science may be described as utopian because no living organism is tortured or mistreated in their experiments, it should not be considered "ideal" because there are some ambiguities (12). For example, we can see that Sharers respect all the other creatures to the extent of referring to them as "sisters," but their manipulation of certain microorganisms for human benefit may be considered to contravene this ideal. For instance, during Spinel's process of adaptation to Shora, Usha introduces certain microorganisms in his stomach so that he can digest Shoran food:

> Usha took between her hands a fine, leafless vine which descended from a profusion of foliage at the ceiling. She set the vine below his ribs, and it swiftly snaked around his waist. Startled, Spinel pulled back, but Usha insisted that he stand still. As his eyes adjusted to the brilliance, he spotted sources of light tucked away amid leafy patches, but no sign of firecrystals, Vines like the one on his arm extended and curled in all directions, like cobwebs come alive.
> […]
> When at last the vine whipped off his waist, he felt just the faintiest twinge of something pulling from his skin. "You mean that *thing* wormed into me?" He stared at the spot, which tickled a bit, though there was no blood.
> "How else? Not just look pretty […]. Have to stir up gut chemistry, for new bugs in food". (*ADIO 92)*

This event may be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, we may think that Usha manipulates the vines so that Spinel is able to digest Shoran food. This way, she would only be taking into account his benefit without considering the vine as an independent organism. On the other hand, the vines may be injecting some sort of symbiotic microorganism into Spinel's stomach. This organism would be fed by Spinel's food but it would also help him to digest certain substances, thus establishing a symbiotic relationship.

Besides, the vine could also somehow benefit with its contact with Spinel's body, but Slonczewski does not offer any explanation on this.

Another example of manipulation that we can find is the way that Sharers attach their house rafts so that they are not moved with the tide. To do so, they use starworms, and to harness the rafts to the starworms they use the arm of a dangerous creature called shockwraith. But hunting the arm of the shockwraith is not easy because several Sharers have to participate, and because these creatures can induce an electric shock. Although Sharers cut these arms at a specific point so that the shockwraith does not suffer any harm, we may still question this practice because it seems to go against Sharer values. In fact, during one of those hunts Lystra herself reflects on this practice: "The cut sent a shock to her own flesh, for she knew well enough the feel of a blade. Shockwraiths did not seem to feel as humans did, but who could say for sure? At any rate, this beast would survive with the arms that remained, and with such a fine meal provided, it would soon grow back the rest" (*ADIO* 114).

Another ambiguous issue concerning the manipulation of the ecosystem is the apparent exploitation of certain non-human creatures. One example of this is the use of clickflies for sharing information and for storing genetic data. As in the previous case, we do not know if clickflies receive any type of benefit from their relationship with Sharers, so we may assume that there is some sort of symbiotic association. When clickflies are killed with the poison with which Valans pollute the air to boycott Sharers' communication channel, the lifeshapers look for an antidote. The question we may wonder at this point is whether Sharers want the antidote only because they cannot communicate with other rafts, or also because clickflies are dying and clickflies are part of Shora, so they must take care of them.

One last issue related to the manipulation of the environment is related with the lack of action of Sharers when the Valan army arrives. Sharers refuse to use harmless plagues to drive Valans out of Shora, even though they are polluting the water and kidnapping, torturing and killing Sharers. In a way, we could perceive in Sharers' lack of action an irresponsible behavior because the consequences of Valans' actions may be even worse than the results of their own—for example, creating a plague to stop Valans' plagues may be have less consequences than the plagues Valan use. But even if some Sharers defend the idea of attacking Valans with some sort of innocuous plague, the discussion ends with the agreement of taking no action because that would go against their values.

Although there are some ambiguities in the relationship between Sharers and the environment in terms of manipulation, all their controversial practices could be somehow explained. Besides, we also need to consider other measures taken by Sharers that help to

maintain the stability of the ecosystem. For example, they explain that they stopped using motorboats to travel long distances because their noise disturbed sea creatures like starworms. They also control reproduction so that the population on Shora is stable; otherwise, their existence would not be sustainable in terms of natural resources. Therefore, even though we may question certain Sharer practices, their efforts to protect the ecosystem are far more numerous and relevant.

Slavery and Colonialism

Alien invasions have many times been interpreted as vehicles for exploring issues of race and slavery. In some cases, the alien is used as a metaphor of the *other* in terms of ethnicity. But other times, the alien is the enemy against whom all humanity fights, and as Jeffrey A. Tucker comments on this aspect: "an investment in a common humanity that transcends race can be and has been a powerful anti-racist tool and inspiration" (Tucker 169). But Butler's novel is not, or not only, about an alien invasion in which humans rebel against the Oankali and their oppressive attitudes. In *LB* humans have to choose if they want their genes mixed with alien ones to give birth to a new hybrid species. In so doing, humans leave behind ideas of race—and even of gender—in order to speak in terms of species. This can be seen in the villages in which the Oankali and humans live with their construct children. But even if there is no racism in human-Oankali villages, racism—or in this case speciesism—can be seen in the attitude of resisters towards the Oankali and also among themselves. Then, humans see aliens as strange creatures whose physical appearance provokes fear and repulsion. But there are still cases of racism among the resisters themselves, as the moment when Akin is refused the entrance in a village populated by white resisters because he is half African American-half Asian—and not because he is a construct young adult, since his appearance at that moment does not betray his hybrid character.

When we consider the speciesist attitude of humans towards the Oankali, we can assume it is a product of the strange appearance of the aliens and of the hatred humans feel because they are in the hands of the Oankali. For Jeffrey A. Tucker, the position to which humans are subjected can be interpreted as "the story of humanity's enslavement to the Oankali," thus mirroring to some extent the experience of slaves and their owners (172). Commenting on the similarities between the situation of humans in the novel and that of slaves, Tucker points out that "the rape of black slave women by white owners and overseers" can be compared to how some women are treated in the novel, with Lilith as an example when she is made pregnant without her consent (172). Nevertheless the issue of rape is also

present in male humans since their sperm is taken from them without consent to make other women pregnant—this is the case of Paul Titus, for example—, which results in some sort of indirect rape but with psychological consequences.

In her article "Mothering Medusa; or, Hybridity and the Construction of Subaltern Agency in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis"* Kristina Busse also notices the points in common between the experience of slaves and that of the humans in the novel. However, she comments that "such a reading is complicated by the apparent feelings of love and sympathy that Lilith (along with many of the other humans) has towards her oppressors" (6). Therefore, Butler does not limit the human experience to that of slaves being carried out to a new and oppressed lifestyle, but she complicates it by creating an ambiguous relationship between aliens and humans, between oppressors and oppressed. Through Lilith's thoughts and feelings we can see how she moves from fear and repulsion to acceptance, resignation and even love. In fact, we could interpret her sympathy for the aliens as some sort of Stockholm syndrome. Nevertheless, her evolution from refusal to acceptance takes place with the birth of her children, when she realizes that they are not monsters but the hope for human survival.

Apart from the similarities between the experience of slaves and that of the humans of the novel, we can also find points in common between the story of the novel and the colonial experience. Although the Oankali invade the Earth, they do not stay there. Instead of this, the Oankali take the surviving humans to their spaceship while they start the healing process of some areas of the planet. However, the process of colonialism may be more evident when humans are allowed to go back to the Earth, when they share their planet with the Oankali and the human "traitors"—as resisters call them. M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas comment that the Oankali invasion differs from colonialism in different ways, but they highlight the fact that whereas "the European colonizers of Africa disrupted and destroyed functioning African cultures," the Oankali do not really destroy human culture since humans had done that themselves with the nuclear war (275). However, Booker and Thomas forget the fact that when humans are offered a second chance, they are told to leave behind all their memories and their past lifestyle in order to embrace the Oankali life. Then, although the Oankali do not repeat the oppressive patterns European colonizers exerted in Africa or in South America, they force humans to forget what they were.

One of the images of the novel that portrays more clearly the colonialism in the novel is that of the spaceship: "The image of deracinated fragments of humanity packed into the body of the aliens' ship inescapably evokes the reader's recollection of the terrible middle passage of the Atlantic slave trade that brought Lilith's ancestors to a 'New World', where a

'gene trade' was also enforced" (Haraway, *Primate* 379). Haraway is one of the critics who draws this parallelism between the situation of the slaves taken from the African colonies to the New World, and that of the humans in the novel, who are taken from the Earth and put in a huge (space)ship with unknown destination. The parallelism is reinforced when we take into account that most humans rescued from the Earth come from the Southern hemisphere because the Northern hemisphere is especially suffering the consequences of the nuclear war. The case of Lilith is particularly interesting because she is an African American woman whose very ancestors could have possibly lived the experience of slavery.

Donna Haraway is not the only critic who compares the situation of the humans that appear in the novel with that of slaves. Jenny Wolmark also highlights how the experience of slaves, and especially of women, can be traced in Butler's works: "the production and reproduction of relations of power in terms of race and gender is at the core of Butler's writing. Much of her fiction is concerned with strong, black female characters who struggle against repressive power structures" (*Aliens* 29). In the novel, Lilith is portrayed as a strong African American woman whose experience resembles that of slaves: taken from their homes and positioned in a defenseless situation in which their identity is stolen from them. So Butler portrays slavery and colonialism from an estranged perspective, thus making readers reflect on these oppressive practices.

As in the case of the issues of imprisonment and animalization in *ADIO*, the examples of slavery and colonialism that appear in the novel are protagonized with Sharers as victims and Valans as perpetrators. Once Valans understand the potential of Sharers and the natural resources that Shora offers, they decide to send some soldiers and scientists to check Sharers' scientific discoveries. Although at first they try to dialogue to learn as much as they can from these women, Sharers decide not to talk to Valans because of their excessive demands. It is then, and moved by the apparent inferiority of Sharers, that the officer Realgar ask his superior for an army to invade the planet. Once the army arrives the situation changes completely and Valans try to colonize Shora by controlling the native population, something they fail to do.

The Valan invasion of Shora may be understood as a metaphor for some colonizing processes of our own history. For example, Valans see Sharers as an inferior civilization, but rather than being interested in "teaching" them, they want to exploit the natural resources of the planet and to exploit Sharers' knowledge for their own benefit. In a parallel way, when the European conquerors met the native populations of America from the 15th century onwards,

they were more interested in their precious metals than in teaching them, with the exception of some religious orders who wanted to convert them and forced them to incorporate European values. In these historical events, and to a lesser extent in the novel, these colonizing procedures resulted in the death of a vast number of members of the native population, whose lands and wealth were expropriated. However, Sharers are able to resist Valan provocations and Valans finally decide to leave the planet behind once they understand that no victory is possible.

In this section we have explored how the Oankali lifestyle may be controversial from an ecofeminist point of view. In both novels we can find examples of manipulation and of oppressive practices that make readers wonder to what extent the Oankali may be considered an ideal society. From my point of view, even if some of the practices carried out by the Oankali, and in some particular cases by Sharers, may be questioned in terms of their adequacy from an ecofeminist point of view, these societies invite readers to see the similarities between their most oppressive attitudes and human ones, so that we reflect on them to find solutions.

5.6.3 Human-Alien Power Relations

From my point of view, Butler's purpose in *LB* is to explore human nature and to answer the question—at least to some extent—of what it means to be human. In order to do so, Butler creates a contrast between humans and aliens using SF metaphors to illustrate how we interpret otherness and how we react to it. Therefore, one of the main issues in the novel is the dualism human/alien (Oankali), which can be further developed into the dualism self/*other*. In contrast with other SF works in which the boundary between human and alien is clear, Butler's novel continually plays with it by shifting narrative points of view. For ecofeminists value dualisms are part of oppressive systems of thought because they are exclusive, oppositional, and they perpetuate value-hierarchical thinking (Plumwood, *Feminism* 46). In the case of Western societies in which the self has usually been represented by white men, social structures like patriarchy and attitudes such as sexism, racism or speciesism, have perpetuated this dualistic vision of the world.

In *LB,* Butler challenges this dualistic perception of the world in terms of self and the *other* by portraying the future of humanity in the hands of group of hybrid children whose genes are half human and half alien. For Jenny Wolmark, Butler's characters in general play

with "the binary oppositions of alien and non-alien, insider and outsider, masculine and feminine" (*Aliens* 28). This trespassing of boundaries can be especially seen in Lilith, who starts the novel being an outsider among the aliens to later become an outsider among humans because of her affinity with the Oankali, and especially with Nikanj. But it is Jodahs, the child of Lilith and Tino that becomes an ooloi during its metamorphosis, who perfectly embodies the deconstruction of dualism by being able to adapt its physical appearance depending on the environment or on the creatures it is with. In this same line, Patricia Melzer states that instead of clearly presenting the dualism self/other, Butler assumes "multiple, contradictory notions of self that undermine the binary and by creating an alternative way to view difference—as an essential part of the self, not something to create boundaries against" (68). Therefore, and just as the Oankali do, the novel shows that it is necessary to accept otherness as part of one's identity if we truly want to embrace difference (Melzer 68). Lilith is representative of this idea because she accepts the Oankali trade once she realizes that her own children, who are part of her own identity, are not monsters at all but just a new and improved species.

In *ADIO*, Slonczewski also focuses on the idea of humanness by continuously questioning the dualism self/*other*. For example, at the beginning of the novel, Merwen and Usha are perceived as the *other* because of their origin and their strange appearance. Once Spinel travels to Shora, he becomes the *other* whereas Merwen and Usha—and all the other Sharers—are seen as the norm. Spinel chooses to adapt to the planet in spite of his otherness, by accepting his own alienness. In fact, when travels back to his hometown he realizes that he does not fit there any more, so he becomes once more the *other* until he returns to Shora to stay there forever. Besides, by using different narrators who tell the story from very different perspectives, the dualism self/*other* becomes no longer valid and hybridity becomes the norm.

In the following pages I will focus on how the relationships between humans and aliens are understood in terms of power. In order to do so I will use the logic of domination to analyze how oppressive attitudes are portrayed in the novel, and which are the possible solutions or alternatives that the two authors offer in their works. Then, I will work with the concept of healthy/unhealthy social systems to question the values of our own conceptual framework in order to find alternative lifestyles that comply with ecofeminist values to a greater or lesser extent.

The logic of domination

A logic of domination is described as "a logical structure of argumentation that 'justifies' domination and subordination" (Warren, *Ecofeminist* 47), so it perpetuates both

binary oppositions as well as power-over relations. Ecocritics and ecofeminists have commented that a logic of domination lies at the core of the "discrimination and oppression on grounds of race, sexual orientation and class as well as species and gender" (Garrard 26). Therefore, a logic of domination is one of the basic components of an oppressive society in which some individuals enjoy a higher position whereas others are discriminated and oppressed because of their sex, species, class and/ or origin. So, in order to analyze the different power relations that exist between humans and aliens in *LB* and in *ADIO,* I am going to use the five different patterns of behavior that make up a logic of domination according to Karen Warren and Val Plumwood: backgrounding, hyperseparation, incorporation, instrumentalism and homogenization.[23] Therefore, by analyzing how these different behaviors are represented in both novels, we can explore how oppression and discrimination are expressed in the different power relations between humans and aliens.

Backgrounding

Backgrounding is the first element that Val Plumwood identifies in a logic of domination and it is present when the self benefits from the *other* without recognizing it. In *LB* we would expect aliens to deny their dependence on human beings in spite of the aliens' need to trade with human genes. However, this denial is only implicit in the Akjai—those Oankali who remain pure—since they survive without mixing their genes with other species. The Oankali do not specifically deny their dependence on humans; in fact, those Oankali who establish the gene trade with humans admit their dependence on humans for survival—which is ambiguous since they could survive without human genes as they had before their arrival. The key aspect is that the Oankali need other species to survive and evolve and since they do not believe they are superior to other creatures, they have no problem in admitting this dependence. We can also see this dependence of the Oankali, and especially of the ooloi, on humans when Nikanj is going through its second metamorphosis and asks Lilith to stay with it through the process, just as Jodahs asks Jesusa and Tomás to do the same in the third part of the novel. This dependency on humans can also be perceived at the end of the first part of the novel when some ooloi lose their human partners in a fight, which leaves them in shock.

Although we would expect examples of backgrounding between the Oankali and humans since the aliens occupy a position of power, we do not find them—perhaps as a consequence of the lack of hierarchical thought among the Oankali. Besides, this situation is

[23] For more information, see section 3.5.1.

even more shocking if we understand the gene trade of the novel as a metaphor for colonialism or even slavery. In historical colonial processes, the colonized populations usually suffered from backgrounding in the hands of colonizers, which shows the treatment to which humans in power have subjected other humans whom they considered inferior. In contrast, we perceive backgrounding when humans do not admit that they have survived thanks to the Oankali rescue, who do not only save them but also heal them. Humans also deny the participation of the Oankali in the processes that have made the Earth habitable for humans. Therefore, in spite of the position of power that the Oankali occupy in the novel, they do not background the importance of human genes, but they admit it just as they admit their dependence on other creatures—like the living organism they travel in. However, humans, and especially resisters, do background the help of the Oankali in their rescue since they focus on their inferior position in the hands of the aliens.

Since oppression and domination play an important role in the relationship between Valans and Sharers in *ADIO*, it would be logical to expect cases of backgrounding. If we first consider Sharers, they do not deny their dependence on Valans because they do not really depend on them. As an independent planet, they rely on their own natural resources. Besides, if we consider their economy, they are almost self-sufficient and even though sometimes they trade products when they need Valan money to travel to Valedon, they are exporters rather than importers. Therefore, they do not depend on Valans except for transport, and that is only in very rare occasions such as the journey of Merwen and Usha to study if Valans can be considered human. Regarding the relationship between Sharers and non-human *others* we can confirm that these women recognize their dependence on them to survive. Sharers are aware of the natural interconnected networks that make up an ecosystem, and that enables them to understand their place in it. This understanding is reflected in the fact that Sharers respect all the other creatures, even the smallest ones, because they realize that all the creatures of Shora are essential for the survival of the rest and of the ecosystem itself. Then, in the case of Sharers we cannot find any form of backgrounding, whether we talk about human or non-human *others.*

Turning our attention to Valans to see if there is any example of backgrounding in their practices, we can appreciate some instances. In their relationship with Sharers, there is no real dependency on them, although some of Sharers' products are really appreciated among wealthy Valans, for example, silkweed clothes and medicines. However, taking into account that these are more or less luxury products, we cannot talk about a real dependence to

be denied. Nevertheless, there is some sort of backgrounding in the fact that Sharers' scientific advances have been disregarded by Valans for a long time, which made it possible for Sharers to live in peace. Even if we cannot talk about dependence in this case, since Valans had not taken profit from Sharers' knowledge until the invasion, the denial of the importance of their scientific discoveries is in itself an example of backgrounding.

Radical exclusion

The second element that Plumwood identifies in a logic of domination is called radical exclusion or hyperseparation and it takes place when the *other* is treated as both different and inferior on the grounds of a characteristic "possessed by the one but not the *other"* (Plumwood, *Feminism* 49). In *LB* the Oankali exclude human beings because of their tendency to hierarchical thought, a trait the aliens use to justify the necessity of the gene trade in order to make it disappear. Instead of considering the similarities between both societies, the Oankali hyperseparate from humans alleging that the combination of hierarchical thought and of intelligence dooms humans to extinction. But even though the aliens consider they are morally superior because they do not think in a hierarchical way, they are at least able to admit the potential of human beings in terms of intelligence. I think that the hyperseparation between the Oankali and humans is somehow mitigated once the Oankali invite humans to take part in the gene trade, thus inviting them to leave behind hierarchical thought.

However, even if the Oankali do not consider themselves a hierarchical species, there are some ambiguities regarding the arrangement of their society. Although we cannot talk about power-relations regarding gender since members of the three different Oankali genders are believed to have an equal position, we see throughout the novel that in some cases, the ooloi is the head of the family and things are done according to its opinion. Besides, the Oankali divide themselves in different social groups including the Akjai, an Oankali group whose DNA remains pure, and whose role is similar to that of government. Although in the examples above mentioned we cannot talk about power-over relations as in the case of humans, we can clearly see a kind of social hierarchy.

The conflict about hierarchical thought is somehow solved in the second part of the novel when Akin and the resisters are granted the opportunity to start a new life on Mars after telling the Oankali about the anxiety of humans with the prospect of their extinction: "We're the best of what they are and the best of what the Oankali are. But because of us, they won't exist anymore" (*LB* 377). Therefore, as in the case of backgrounding, it is easier to find examples of hyperseparation among the humans in the novel than between humans and the

Oankali. For example, resisters consider Lilith a kind of traitor demon because of her alliance with the Oanali but also because of the modifications done to her body, making her less human. Akin himself suffers from hyperseparation when he is denied the entrance into a racist resister village because of the color of his skin. We can also perceive hyperseparation in the relationship between resisters and the Oankali, since these humans only see the alienness of the Oankali instead of admitting the similarities. So, even though the aliens continuously make reference to humans' hierarchical thought, instead of letting humans die on Earth, they rescue them to offer them a second chance. Thus, in the novel differences are emphasized but the conflict is solved through genetic engineering by creating a hybrid species.

In *A Door into Ocean*, physical appearance plays an essential role regarding radical exclusion. Both Valans and Sharers question if the other civilization can be considered human, and whereas Sharers study Valans with an open mind, Valans simply treat Sharers as animals. According to the descriptions given in the book, Valans' appearance is completely human, whereas Sharers—despite their anthropomorphic structure—present certain specific features that make their appearance somehow shocking: purplish-blue skin, webbed toes and fingers and no hair on their bodies. These small physical differences together with their particular lifestyle and the absence of men on Shora make Valans think of Sharers as witches and sometimes as animals.

Throughout the book we can find examples of both Valans and Sharers questioning the humanness of each other. At the beginning of the novel Sharers are referred to as creatures similar to women, since Merwen and Usha decide to wear clothes while they stay on Valedon because their habit of being naked could be misinterpreted on Valedon. Some pages later when Spinel explains to his sister his intention of travelling to Shora, she is surprised and exclaims: "Why, they're not even human!" (*ADIO* 18); and some pages later, it is Spinel himself who says something similar. Spinel's comment is quite surprising if we take into account that when he says so he had already met Usha and Merwen a couple of times, with the opportunity of talking to them as equals and of noticing the numerous similarities between Sharers and Valans. However, it is not until later in the novel, once he is embedded in Sharer culture, that he is able to see Sharers for what they are, that is: human beings.

One of the issues discussed in Sharers' Gatherings is whether to consider Valans as humans or not. Some Sharers are quite critical of this and describe Valans as children that are sick with their violence and their oppressive behaviors. Lystra, one of Merwen and Usha's daughters, is also quite negative with Valans, as we can see in her reaction when she first

encounters Spinel. As Valans, and Spinel at first, refer to Sharers as animals, Lystra refers to Spinel with the pronoun "it" and with the word "creature." Lystra's opinion of Spinel evolves in the novel to the extent that she falls in love with him, but she and other Sharers remain quite skeptical concerning Valans in general, even before the invasion, because Shora has never needed them. However, other Sharers defend Valans' humanness in biological terms in spite of their different appearance.

Then, both societies present examples of radical exclusion in relation to their own definition of humanness. On the one hand, Valans think of Sharers as of animals, and thus they have been relegated "to subhuman status for thirty years" (*ADIO* 89). On the other hand, Sharers try to analyze if Valans are human and if, as such, they deserve a place on Shora, an idea to which many Sharers oppose because of the violent behavior of Valans:

> There had been incidents, especially in recent years, when Valans had deliberately shared physical injury among themselves or with Sharers, even to the point of death. And on Valedon, there were those who openly proclaimed that *death pays a wage*. Yet Valans never shared Unspeaking, or showed evidence of any sort of treatment for these obvious mental defects. (*ADIO* 79)

As we see, Sharers wonder if Valans are human not from a physical point of view but from a cultural and conceptual one. At the end of the novel, Sharers finally decide to close their door to Valans as a consequence of the invasion and of all the events that take place during this time, but the example of Spinel, who decides to stay on Shora, is a ray of hope in the relationship between Valans and Sharers after the great disappointment of Nisi's behavior. With his choice of staying on Shora, Spinel shows that Valans and Sharers are far more similar than they think they are.

Incorporation/relational definition

Incorporation or relational definition is the third pattern present in a logic of domination, and it has to do with the idea that an inferior group is defined or described in relation to the group in power. When in *LB* the Oankali decide to save humans, they do so with the desire of trade genes with humans in order to eliminate the dangerous genetic flaw that had led them to a nuclear war. The Oankali do not want to assimilate human DNA, but they also insist on keeping humans away from their old lifestyle and their old habits. For example, when Lilith is awakened, the aliens do not allow her to have contact with other human beings despite her insistence, just as she is not allowed to have writing materials or any other thing from her past life. One of the moments in which we can perceive the efforts of the Oankali to incorporate humans takes place when Lilith asks about her future:

> "You'll begin again. We'll put you in areas that are clean of radioactivity and history. You will become something other than you were."
> "And you think destroying what was left of our cultures will make us better?"
> "No. Only different." (*LB* 34)

In their effort to create a new hybrid species, the Oankali want humans to forget about their pre-war lifestyle. For this reason, when they are back on Earth, the aliens place humans in empty areas of the jungle where no trace of civilization can be found. There, they grow villages with a symbiotic material similar to the one with which the spaceship is made of. As a contrast, resisters travel through the jungle searching for ruins of ancient towns in order to start again: "'Smashed and covered by the Oankali,' Gabe told Akin. 'They didn't want us living here and remembering what we used to be'" (*LB* 384).

Although the Oankali talk about a gene trade from which both species will benefit, the main difference is that the aliens need to to mix their genes with those of other species in order to survive. For some humans, the gene trade represents the hope for a new species which will not end up destroying itself; but for resisters, the gene trade means the extinction of humanity. Ninkanj explains the benefits of the gene trade to Lilith commenting that their hybrid children will inherit the best features of both species, but she rejects this idea by complaining that those children will not be human (*LB* 247). From my point of view, this is an example of incorporation since the gene trade will deprive humans of one of their most important traits—according to the Oankali—, whereas the alien species will be able to overcome their physical limitations, that is, with the use of human cancer cells they will be able to regrow limbs, for example. The issue here is that the aliens refer to hierarchical thought as a genetic trait instead of referring to it as a cultural trait, which makes it impossible for humans to leave behind this destructive behavior. However, even if they are told that they are doomed to extinction, resisters demand the choice to establish themselves without the Oankali intromission, and Akin becomes their spokesperson. This way, Akin fights against the complete incorporation of humans, by asking permission to establish a colony of humans:

> "I want to establish them as Akjai Humans."
> "They won't survive."
> "Perhaps not."
> "There's no perhaps. They won't survive their Contradiction."
> "Then let them fail. Let them have the freedom to do that, at least." (*LB* 468)

With the human contradiction—intelligence and hierarchical thought—Butler establishes the premise that human beings are genetically doomed to extinction, partly because of her disenchantment with some of the events that took place during her own lifetime. However,

some readers may reject these ideas just as Christa Grewe-Volpp does in her article: "To be human means to be not only biologically determined but to have the right to decide one's own future, even if that involves war and ecocide" (165).

As we can see, the humans of the novel suffer a process of incorporation. From the beginning, their identities and their past lives seem to be erased once they awaken in the Oankali spaceship. Besides, the Oankali impose their lifestyle on those who accept the trade to the extent that these humans are genetically modified so that they are able to grow structures just as the Oankali do. For resisters, this process of incorporation is an imposition, but those humans who accept the trade also accept Oankali values and lifestyle, so that they somehow consent to this incorporation.

In *ADIO* it is difficult to find examples of incorporation or relational definition among Sharers. When Spinel arrives on Shora we expect Sharers to impose their lifestyle on him, but they do not. He is not asked to take his clothes off, and Sharers trade silkweed and medicines so that he can eat his usual food before his body is modified to be able to digest Shoran food. When finally Spinel accepts Sharers and his skin turns purplish-blue because of the breathmicrobes, it is because he wants it so, and he rejects taking a medicine to control the color of his skin. Therefore, Spinel's process of incorporation into Sharer society is gradual and completely voluntary. Among Valans it is easier to find examples of incorporation. As a result of considering Sharers an inferior species, Valans impose their habits on Sharers. For example, when Sharers are taken to Raelgar's office, Valans want them to be clothed even though they are on Shora and Sharers are always naked. Similarly, during the invasion Sharers are not allowed to hold Gatherings, which are one of the most representative habits of Sharer lifestyle. Although this measure is taken because Valans do not want Sharers to meet in groups of more than three or four people because they think they may be plotting against their invasion, the truth is that they deprive Sharers of one of their more important routines, that of sharing knowledge.

Therefore, the existence of examples of incorporation in the novel is conditioned by the conceptual frameworks of the two societies portrayed in it. On the one hand, since Sharers respect otherness and individual identities, they never try to impose their values on someone else, and Spinel's process of adaptation is an example of this. On the other hand, Valans think of Sharers as inferior beings and they oppress them by imposing their values and habits, which they consider superior.

Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism—or objectification—is the fourth element Val Plumwood identifies in a logic of domination and she defines it as the situation in which the *other* is conceived as an instrument or an object in the hands of those in power. In *LB* we can find examples of instrumentalism both among humans and between the Oankali and humans. For example, resisters kidnap women and construct children—those that could pass for humans before their metamorphosis—in order to exchange them for food or weapons. In the case of construct children, they are usually bought by families who treat them as human children until they reach metamorphosis; but kidnapped women are usually raped and beaten up, becoming objects on which some resisters take out their frustrations. But instrumentalism is also present in the Oankali society in a different way. The ability of the Oankali to perform genetic engineering becomes dangerous because it enables them to treat living beings as objects. An example of this is the relationship between the Oankali and their ship. Although this relationship is described as symbiotic since both elements benefit one from the other, it is true that the Oankali enjoy a higher control as we can see when Lilith is told that the ship is a dormant entity because the Oankali have decided so (*LB* 35).

In the relationship between humans and aliens we can also find examples of instrumentalism. When humans were rescued from the Earth, the Oankali did not do so as an act of empathy or generosity. They rescue humans after having been studying them for some time before the war, thus realizing both their potential and their flaws. Once humans are rescued and put into suspended animation, they become objects of study for the Oankali, who explore humans' bodies without their consent, although never causing pain. This idea troubles Lilith, who feels like as a caged animal despite the efforts of the Oankali to make her stay as comfortable as possible.

Although the Oankali justify their actions with the idea of the higher good, they manipulate human bodies without consent, making of humans some sort of object or of instrument they use to achieve a goal. The Oankali want human genes because they can use them for their own purposes, so humans lose part of their identity once they become objects of study. This way, humans are forced to suffer the same experiences other creatures have been subjected to by humans themselves:

> The Oankali instrumentalize humans just as these had mistreated their natural environment on earth. Humans must now have the terrible experience of being the object of scientific research themselves. In the beginning of the trilogy they are treated like animals in a cage or a laboratory. Put in suspended animation, their reproductive organs are used to breeding new human beings. (Grewe-Volpp 163)

This way Butler uses the Oankali to mirror human practices such as animal experimentation and even experimentation with humans.

Although the painless experiments the Oankali carry out are both for aliens' and humans' sake, their practices are perceived as controversial by most humans in the novel, as well as by readers. For example, Joseph Shing in the first part of the novel points out how humans have developed eugenics programs to improve humanity, many times at the expense of humans' lives: "There was a lot of work being done in genetics before the war. That may have evolved into some kind of eugenics program afterward. Hitler might have done something like that after World War Two if he had had the technology and if he had survived" (*LB* 143). However, even though Butler uses the alien civilization to mirror human experimentation, the Oankali do not physically harm human beings, in fact, they heal them and enhance their health. Although the goal of the Oankali is to heal humans from their genetic flaw—and from many other genetic diseases—the fact that they do so without their consent makes us define their practices as instrumentalism. We can reach the conclusion that whereas there are examples of instrumentalism among resisters, those examples protagonized by the Oankali are ambiguous in terms of purpose.

Considering Valan society and some of its oppressive patterns in *ADIO,* it is not surprising to find some practices that may be defined as instrumentalism. Slavery as such does not exist on Valedon, but the wealthy classes have servos or robots that carry out all the annoying tasks that have to do with house cleaning. Although there is no precise information about the conditions of these robots or about their feelings, their existence may be understood as a metaphor for slavery. In Valan society there is a great breach between wealthy citizens and those of the lower classes. Humble people like Spinel and his family are almost treated as slaves, working all day long without getting enough money to maintain the family, and subjected to very controlling laws. But among Valans we can also find another type of instrumentalism: the exploitation of the environment. There are different references in the novel to the way Valans and other civilizations have exhausted their natural resources, in contrast with Sharers' relationship with nature: "for stone was more than a passion for Valan citizens, it was a source of exchange with distant planets which had exhausted their own supplies of various rare minerals. The mineral potential of Shora's untapped seabed was one reason for a new interest in that moon" (*LB* 28).

In the clash between Valans and Sharers we can also find behaviors that can be described as instrumentalist. The reason why Valans invade Shora—apart from its rich resources—is because they want to take advantage of their scientific knowledge. At first the invasion is peaceful and Sharers share their knowledge with Valans but these try to impose their ways and Sharers decide to stop talking to them as an act of rebellion. From then on, Sharers are more or less treated as objects, deprived of their rights by a civilization that considers them a subhuman species. For Valans, Sharers become the means to obtain scientific knowledge and since they decide not to participate in the exchange, Valans decide to torture them disregarding their own concerns and their status as equals, something they denied by considering them animals. Therefore, Valans instrumentalize Sharers in order to obtain information from them, mistreating them and even killing some individuals.

The case of Sharers and instrumentalism is completely different. The only examples of something similar to instrumentalism in Shora are related to smaller creatures and Spinel. First, Sharers take advantage of other creatures for their own sake, as in the case of clickflies, which work as a communication network. However, we are not really aware of the connotations of this relationship and instead of considering it exploitative, it may have some symbiotic purpose. In the case of Spinel, Sharers study him to learn if Valans should be treated as humans. Even if we think Sharers use Spinel for their own goal, they treat him as an equal, respecting his identity.

Homogenization

According to Plumwood, homogenization consists of seeing the individual as a member of a group, thus neglecting his or her identity. In *LB* we can see that even if the Oankali study each human individually, they consider humans as a collectivity without taking into account individual characters and concerns. We can clearly see how humans react in different ways to imprisonment to the proposal of the gene trade. However, the Oankali think that all humans are driven by hierarchical thought and that this feature makes them a violent species. Nevertheless, we can see in the novel that even if the Oankali think of hierarchical thought as a genetic flaw, there are many humans who do not show hierarchical thought and whose behavior is far from violent. In general, the portrayal of humans in the novel is rather negative, which supports the Oankali belief that all humans suffer the genetic flaw with which the aliens relate humans' destructive behavior. We can see examples of violent humans who rape women, xenophobic villages in which non-white people are not allowed, kidnappers of children who trade them for food or women, and even some murderers. But Grewe-Volpp

points out that there are many other characters whose behavior shows that humans should not be all labeled as flawed, and Lilith is a good representative: "Not only does Lilith successfully overcome xenophobia, there are also several men who do not give in to aggressive tendencies, who are gentle and nurturing and who base their actions on rational decisions" (157). Regarding resisters the analysis is more complex since it is among them where we can find the more violent and dangerous individuals. But even within the resister group there are clearly different characters, as in the case of Tate and Neci Roybal, when the latter wants to cut construct children's tentacles and Tate opposes.

Therefore, even if we believe that humans are genetically flawed as the Oankali say—especially taking into account the nuclear war, and resisters kidnapping children and raping women—, the Oankali do not take into account individual wills, thus judging humans as a whole and not as individuals. Considering this, Oankali behavior is quite ambiguous since they are able to deeply explore human bodies and their genes, but they fail to notice how different some humans are from others in terms of values and beliefs. With characters like Lilith or Tate, who defy the idea that humans are violent by nature, Butler challenges the homogenization to which humans in the novel are subjected.

One of the conclusions we reach after having explored how the first four patterns of a logic of domination are portrayed in *ADIO* is that there is a clear contrast between Valans and Sharers, with the result that Valans are more prone to oppressive behaviors. In the case of homogenization, we find that both civilizations judge each other as a group and not as individuals. Valans try to identify a leader among Sharers, and even though Merwen acts as the spokesperson, the lack of a clear leading figure supports the vision of Sharers as a mass of "catfish." For Valans, it is easier to see Sharers as a group since all its members are women with purplish-blue skin and without hair, so that the differences among them are less than those among Valan citizens. So, when groups of women stay outside Valan headquarters on Shora as a way of protesting against the invasion, they are seen as a mass rather than individuals, and this makes it easier for Valans to repel them. Spinel is the character that helps readers understand that each Sharer has her own character, something that can be clearly seen in their self-naming: Merwen the Impatient, Nisi the Deceiver or Usha the Inconsiderate. With Spinel's interaction with Sharers we can see how each sister has her own worries, duties and character, thus enabling us to see them as individuals and not as a blue mass.

But Spinel is also a key figure when exploring how Sharers homogenize Valans. When Sharers analyze to what extent Valans are humans, they also judge them as a mass and not as

individuals. For these women, Valans are children who do not know how to behave. They also describe them as sick because of their violent behaviors and because that violence often goes unpunished. However, this is just some Sharers' opinion because other sisters—Merwen and Usha, for example—think that Valans and Sharers have many things in common and that they can coexist. Although at the end of the novel Sharers close the door to Shora and stop any contact with Valedon, the idea that Valans can become Sharers is made explicit with Spinel, who prefers to stay on the ocean planet. Whereas Spinel learns from Sharers to live a pacifist life, Nisi—who has lived on Shora longer than Spinel—ends up behaving in a violent way, disappointing her sisters.

Therefore, in this case we see that both Valans and Sharers homogenize each other. However, the interesting case is that individual members of each civilization act as bridge between the two societies, and Spinel is the key figure in this respect for two main reasons. First, Spinel travels to Shora and realizes that Sharers are as humans as he is and that they have the same feelings he has. This way, Sharers are shown individually as human beings and not as the aliens that Valans—including Spinel at the beginning—believe them to be. Second, he shows Sharers that Valans should not be judged as a group because each individual chooses how to behave. He also shows that Valans are able to become "sisters" if they want to and if they accept that other lifestyles exist—possibly healthier and more respectful ones.

Considering power-relations between human and aliens, in *LB* we find that the aliens become the creatures in power whereas humans are relegated to a subjugated position as a punishment for their behavior. This can be clearly seen in the sexual intercourses between humans, in which the ooloi is in charge of the neural stimulation so humans do not even touch each other. The anguishing situation of human beings is especially present in the character of Lilith, who

> … compares her situation in turn to that of a toy, a child, a pet, and a breeding animal. Even when offered a choice, she feels coerced, because she is constantly aware of her complete powerlessness: whether she asks that the aliens not clone her or whether she simply wants pen and paper, none of her wishes are honored. (Busse 8)

However, and as we have seen in the analysis of the elements of a logic of domination in the Oankali society, Butler's aliens do not completely exert their power over humans, or at least they do not do so for only their own sake. Although there are some examples of instrumentalism, homogenization or incorporation, they are just a few when compared to the examples of those behavioral patterns that can be found in our own society. If there is

something that defines the Oankali it is their ambiguous behavior towards humans, which is somehow amended by the construct children on which the narrator focuses on the second and third parts of the novel, Akin and Jodahs.

In the novel, the Oankali continually justify their controversial practices—sterilization, suspended animation—with the idea that humans are fatally flawed because they let their intelligence serve their hierarchical thought instead of guiding it. Similarly, readers can easily perceive about the Oankali contradiction in the sense that even if the aliens always talk about a higher good and human salvation, they use humans for their purposes, rejecting any human possibility of independence from them. So with these two contradictory civilizations Butler shows that the acceptance of otherness is based on respect and on the elimination of dualistic thought and of patterns of domination.

Christa Grewe-Volpp has commented on the difficulties of defining the Oankali as an ecofeminist society because of their ambiguity towards humans, and to some extent I agree with her since there is a clear contradiction between the ideals the Oankali defend and their treatment of humans. However, and from an ecofeminist point of view, I think that the most important aspect of the novel is not the Oankali as such, but the hybrid progeny they create together with humans. Booker and Thomas also point out that even if the Oankali rescue entails the ultimate destruction of the Earth and possibly "the end of humanity as a distinct species," the aliens may be considered benevolent because they count on humans for their "posthuman species of human-alien hybrids" (271).

Butler uses this trilogy to address her concerns about humans and illustrate what it means to be considered the *other*, concluding her exploration of otherness with the creation of a new species in which the defects of both humans and the Oankali are corrected. When humans are rescued and offered the gene trade, they are forced to understand that in order to survive they need to redefine the concept of humanity by embracing otherness. Some humans do not want to accept that, and they are eventually offered the opportunity of establishing their own colony on Mars. But those humans who accept the trade are aware of the fact that even if *homo sapiens* as a species is doomed to extinction, humanity will partly survive in the construct children. Therefore, these hybrid children represent a hopeful future for a non-hierarchical society in which otherness is truly understood and appreciated.

From the analysis of power relations in *ADIO*, one of the conclusions we reach is that while Butler's *LB* is focused on the concept of the alien, Slonczewski's novel invites readers to reconsider the definition of what it means to be human. In this novel, Valans seems to have power over Sharers, and they use it for controlling and torturing the native population of

Shora. However, at the end of the novel readers realize that Sharers—because of their attitude towards life and violence, but also because of their scientific knowledge—are the ones who have always had the power. With the analysis of how the patterns of a logic of domination are represented in *ADIO* we conclude that there is a clear contrast between Valans and Sharers. Although both civilizations treat the other as an inferior, the main difference is that Sharers are open to dialogue with Valans while Valans seem to have a fixed and unchangeable opinion of Sharers.

As we have seen, all the elements of a logic of domination can be found in one way or another in Valedon. If we analyze the main characteristics of the Valan society we can see that there are so many similarities between it and our own society that Valedon somehow mirrors the Earth. Both are hierarchically organized with fixed social structures in which those groups in the lower levels are often subjected to the ruling groups. Bearing this in mind, Slonczewski offers in her novel an alternative lifestyle to that of Valedon—and to our own—in which values of equality and respect are highly emphasized. Thus the author invites readers to reconsider what it means to be human in order to see if a different definition of humanness is possible. Even if Sharers are a utopian and unreachable type of society, Slonczewski uses them to warn us about the consequences of our actions and to propose alternative ways of relating with each other and with the environment, thus leaving behind dualistic thinking and the logic of domination.

In these last pages I have analyzed how oppressive attitudes that are present in our world—such as dualistic thinking or the elements of a logic of domination—are portrayed in the novels. Although the two works focus on the relationships and conflicts between two civilizations that may be considered alien to ours—especially in the case of the Oankali and Sharers—I think that the main purpose of both authors is to explore those underlying attitudes that drive human beings to violence, disrespect for otherness, and destruction of the environment. Butler and Slonczewski do not only analyze our failures as a species, but they also propose alternative frameworks of thought characterized by the absence of hierarchical thinking and of patterns of domination. For this reason, the next section of the analysis will focus on the positive values of the Oankali and of Sharers from an ecofeminist point of view.

Healthy social systems

In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, Karen Warren classifies societies into healthy and unhealthy ones by focusing on both humans and the environment:

> Not only will the health of a social system be determined, in part, by how well it meets the needs of humans as social and ecological selves; it must also be determined, in part, by how well it provides for the flourishing or well-being of the natural environment (on which vital human social and ecological needs depend) (*Ecofeminist* 205).

The first conclusion we can reach after considering these words is that our own society should be described as an unhealthy one since the needs, and rights, of some human beings fail to be met in certain regions of our world. Considering the environment, human beings have also failed to provide for its well-being through practices such as deforestation, pollution or the exploitation of natural resources.

If we focus on the novels analyzed in this dissertation, the human society portrayed in *LB* can also be described as unhealthy, especially if we take into account that at the beginning of the novel we are told that humans had started a nuclear war, which implies that both the needs of humans and of the environment have been totally disregarded. In first place, the war has caused directly or indirectly the deaths of millions of people. And in second place, the well-being of the natural environment has been completely neglected since the war has brought about the destruction of millions of animal and plant species as well as the alteration of the Earth cycles by provoking a devastating nuclear winter.

Following Warren's description of the healthiness of social systems, she continues explaining that unhealthy ones

> tend to be highly rigid, closed systems. Rules and roles tend to be nonnegotiable and to be determined by Ups in Up-Down, power-over hierarchies. A high value is placed on control and exaggerated concepts of rationality (even though, ironically, the system's survival may depend on irrational ideologies of denial and rationalization). (*Ecofeminist* 205)

Humanity, both in the novel and in in our world, is clearly arranged in power-over hierarchies—even if we do not consider hierarchical thought a genetic flaw as the Oankali do—in which those labeled as the *other* have a lower status in contrast with those in the upper positions of society. Similarly, rationality is exaggeratedly valued, with the consequence of conceiving non-human animals as well as nature as a resource to be exploited.

However, humanity is not the only civilization in *LB* that can be defined as unhealthy. Even though the Oankali may be considered ecofeminists to some extent, their most controversial practices correspond to unhealthy social systems, as we have seen in the previous pages. They do not consider themselves a hierarchical society, but there is clearly a hierarchy in which humans are subjected to the Oankali control. Besides, even if the Oankali respect nature and praise life, their ability for genetic engineering makes their intrusive

techniques somehow problematic since, for example, animals and plants cannot decide for themselves if they want their genes to be altered.

Therefore, we can see that neither humans nor the Oankali have completely healthy systems, since some of their practices and values do not comply with ecofeminist ideals. However, it seems that even if they are not utopian, Butler presents the aliens as a desirable species with which humans can escape their destruction, albeit at a high price. Human resisters do not even consider the possibility that humanity is somehow poisoned and thus doomed to extinction, and for this reason we may wonder if they are not able to see their problem because their hierarchical way of thinking makes it impossible to realize that alternative lifestyles are possible. Besides, to renounce their pure humanity would mean that humans are not the most important creatures of the universe, a belief supported by anthropocentrism and challenged by Butler through the Oankali. Taking into account that Butler thought that humans had something wrong in them as a species, it is easy to assume that the gene trade with the Oankali is the solution she proposes: that is, a total redefinition of humanity. However, resisters do not believe to be genetically flawed and they reject any change to their rigid social systems, a feature Warren identifies as part of unhealthy systems, maybe as a consequence of their fear of difference and hybridity. Therefore, hybridity is the solution Butler offers and those who resist this idea are doomed to extinction; as Kristine Busse comments on resisters: "their attempt to keep humanity 'pure' is punished with their impending destruction. Butler implies that we need to change (or allow our self-difference to develop) if we are not to commit suicide" (12-13).

Regarding healthy systems and the concept of hybridity, I consider that the most interesting aspect of the novel is not the contrast established between the two civilizations but the third civilization that appears when humans and the Oankali breed. As we are told in the novel, these hybrid children have the best features of the two species erasing the flaws of their ancestors. On the one hand, hierarchical thinking disappears, giving place to a society in which all members enjoy the same status and governmental decisions are taken by consensus. This way, violent behavior is controlled and the intelligence inherited from humans may serve other purposes. On the other hand, hybrid children are able to take into account both human and Oankali concerns, leaving behind the paternalistic attitude of the aliens towards human beings. Besides, these hybrid children take profit of the features of cancer cells to alter the matter of their own bodies so that they can better adjust to the environment, thus enhancing the fluidity of their identities.

In a way, the trade between humans and the Oankali can be seen as the next step in human evolution. Even though most of the humans that appear in *LB* are negatively portrayed, Butler ends up offering them two choices: to stay completely human and face a doomed future—according to the Oankali—or to evolve into a new species becoming something no longer completely human. Even if there is a choice, the fact that Butler does not develop the idea of the Mars colony makes it clear, from my point of view, that she favors those humans who accept the genetic trade to become parents of a hybrid species. This way she shows that, for her, the only possible way for humans to survive is to change their very nature, to go a step beyond in the evolutionary process, and to develop a new paradigm. Whether we talk about a better adaptation to the environment or about the survival of the fittest, it is clear that what Butler offers in the last part of this novel is the birth of a new species that partially preserves humanity.

This evolutionary step, more or less imposed on humans, is based on a process of hybridization that somehow echoes Lynn Margulis' symbiogenesis theory, as Christa Grewe-Volpp points out. According to Margulis' theory, symbiogenesis propounds that "new species have not emerged from the natural selection of a rich genetic material but from the symbiosis of very different life-forms that have evolved from bacteria" (Grewe-Volpp 161). Therefore, Margulis' theory deduces that new tissues, organs and organisms are originated "by establishment of long-term or permanent symbiosis" (Margulis 6). For Christa Grewe-Volpp, Butler's model for the evolution of humanity follows Margulis' symbiogenesis theory "because it emphasizes the embeddedness of human beings into the natural environment much more radically than Darwin's theory of natural selection" (Grewe-Volpp 161). Butler imagines the future of humanity by creating a new species born out of something like a symbiotic relationship between humans and the Oankali. Although in this case the process of creation of a new species is accelerated by means of genetic engineering, it clearly echoes Margulis' symbiogenesis. Besides, Margulis' theory also focuses on how evolution is directly dependent on the relationship species establish both with other species and with the environment itself, and this can also been seen in Butler's novel. The Oankali are presented as a far more developed civilization than humans, and this is appreciated in the symbiotic relationship the aliens have with their spaceships, or when they are able to build structures with the touch of their hands. In fact, progress in the novel is presented as based on the ability to live in harmony with the environment, as a contrast with the human destruction of the Earth. Therefore, Butler proposes for humans a hybrid future in which the special ability for

genetic engineering enables their construct offspring to understand the relationships among living beings and their dependence on them for survival.

But the future imagined by Butler is not only interesting regarding the relationship with the environment and with other living beings. Otherness also plays an important role in the human-Oankali progeny, since construct children are specially portrayed as changing creatures whose sex and physical appearance does not become stable until reaching adulthood—and even then construct ooloi are able to modify their anatomy. This particular lack of rigidity in their growing-up process resembles the lack of rigid social structures in their society, or as Theodora Goss and John Paul Riquelme comment on the results of the gene trade between humans and the Oankali: the "cross-species mixtures result in a chameleonic, adaptable hybrid whose plasticity contrasts with rigid hierarchical attitudes" (441). To some extent we can perceive a parallelism between the adaptability of the bodies of construct children and the lack of rigidity of the society they belong to. Their lack of hierarchies contrasts with how resisters organize themselves, even socially, by treating women as inferior and by rejecting in some cases people from a particular ethnic minority. Therefore, Butler's future consists of a society in which otherness is appreciated since physical appearances are fluid depending on the necessities of the moment, especially in the case of the ooloi. Because of this, there is no ethnic division as there is no specific sex, at least until maturity. Similarly, and maybe as a consequence of the adaptability and hybridity of the new species, they lack any type of hierarchical structure with all the members having an equal status in society.

We can imagine the future Butler provides for human beings by observing the construct families, which are representative of the new society they have created. These families are characterized by difference, multiplicity and mixture, but apart from this, one of their most prominent features is their closeness. Because of the particularities of the anatomy of the Oankali, the closeness between the members of a family is not only carried at a social level, but also at a biochemical one. Therefore, by hooking into each other's neural system, construct families are able to function almost as a unity. When Lilith explains to Jesusa the consequences of accepting the Oankali she states: "'Look at my family, Jesusa—and realize you're only seeing six of our children. This is what you can expect if you mate with Jodahs. There's closeness here that I didn't have with the family I was born into or with my husband and son'" (*LB* 671). Alhough physical contact between human partners is almost nonexistent once the ooloi hooks into their bodies, Lilith realizes that the closeness between the members of a construct family is beyond human standards.

Construct families are also interesting as representative of the new society Butler proposes because they mirror the tolerance and respect towards otherness that ecofeminists defend. Although the Oankali consider themselves respectful with the *other*, their treatment of humans does not always agree with this. Therefore, a true understanding of otherness does not take place in the novel until the first construct children are born, since they are the first ones to really embrace and respect difference. Lilith's family perfectly represents this idea of heterogeneity with children born of five different parents: three Oankali and two humans of different origins since Lilith is an African American and her mates, first Joseph and then Tino, are Asian and Hispanic respectively. This new type of family responds to the ecofeminist family ideal to which Patrick Murphy refers in the following words: "The relationships that are plotted out, racial and interracial, marital and extramarital, and multigenerational, cannot be understood outside of an ecological framework, one that is based on feminist recognitions of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and heterarchy" (*Literature* 55).

Therefore, in *LB* Butler does not only present two opposing unhealthy—to different extents—systems, but she also offers a third system that complies with ecofeminist values. This way the novel works as an experiment of the type of society that would emerge from a redefinition of humanity in which humans stop being hierarchical and anthropocentric creatures. Critic Jim Miller comments on this fact when he describes Butler's fiction as "an imaginative site of experimentation where new notions of identity and community are under construction" (338). In *LB* we can see how identity is continually redefined while challenging concepts of self and *other* and human and alien. This deconstruction of dualisms is supported by the shifting narrative voices which provide readers with a complete overview of the process of the trespassing of the human/alien boundary.

Although we can see how homogeneity is challenged throughout the novel, it is probably with the characters of Akin and Jodahs with which these boundaries between alien and human and self and *other* are more clearly trespassed. For Christa Grewe-Volpp, it is Jodahs "who has the potential to transcend the unequal relationship between aliens and humans, to integrate and accept both and start a new colony on earth—a sexual neuter, an ooloi, partly (black!) human being, partly alien" (167). Then, Jodahs represents the last stage in the gene trade between humans and the Oankali since it is the first construct ooloi born to a human mother. He thus becomes the culmination of hybridity between human and alien, a genderless creature who is able to change its appearance to adapt to its surroundings, thus challenging dualisms such as human/alien, human/animal, or male/female.

The portrayal of Jodahs as the hybrid who trespasses boundaries is closely related to the definition Donna Haraway gives of the cyborg in "A Cyborg Manifesto." Booker and Thomas comment on this adding that "the positive treatment of hybridity in Xenogenesis has led many critics to see the trilogy as an endorsement of the kind of hybrid subjectivity famously associated by Donna Haraway with the cyborg" (276). In fact, in "A Cyborg Manifesto" Haraway includes Octavia Butler as one of the "theorists for cyborgs" (*Simians* 174) since the novel *LB* "constitutes a powerful challenge to the traditional Western celebration of sameness and suspicion of Otherness" (Booker and Thomas 276). With its complete otherness Jodahs—who is half alien and half human, half African American and half Hispanic—fights against the rigidity of human social systems; besides, the ability to change its appearance makes it impossible to classify it within a particular species, ethnic group or even gender. So, the posthuman future Butler envisions in her novel is based on hybridity and on the fluidity of identities, which prevents construct people from perpetuating hierarchical thought.

When we use the concept of healthiness in social systems in the analysis of *ADIO*, we conclude once more that there is a clear contrast between Valans and Sharers. On the one hand, Sharer social system is healthy since it meets the needs of both humans and the environment in a sustainable way. On the other hand, Valedon is representative of those concepts that Warren associates with unhealthy social systems, that is, power-over hierarchies and rigidity. Valan society is described as a highly hierarchical one in which social positions are signaled by the gemstones Valans carry. During the invasion of Shora we can also see how Valan soldiers impose their will disregarding Sharers' habits and lifestyle. Warren adds that these unhealthy systems place a high value on control, and this can be seen in Valans' attempts to control everything that happens on Shora, from the cycles of the native creatures to the communication network of Sharers, by creating pests and plagues. Similarly, whereas we see Valans torturing Sharers to death, Sharers heal injured Valan soldiers in their facilities. Therefore, these two civilizations, Sharers and Valans, are representative examples of healthy and unhealthy social systems, respectively.

In spite of the negative portrayal of Valans, not only because of their behavior during the invasion but also because of Nisi's decision to destroy the Valan headquarter, Spinel is the character that offers hope in the story. Although Sharers seem to agree that Valans are not humans and that for this reason the door should be closed thus ending any contact with Valedon, Spinel functions as a bridge between the two civilizations when he tries to make

them understand each other. Because of the number of similarities between Valedon and our own society, Slonczewski seems to be using her novel to highlight harmful human practices, while portraying a society that works as an alternative to our own. Then, Spinel becomes a key figure with his personal evolution as a metaphor of the evolutionary process and change of paradigm that humans should start in order to succeed as a species. As a biologist much involved in environmentalism, Slonczewski uses her novel to criticize the relationship of human beings with the environment. In so doing, she does not only portray the oppressive attitudes that have lead humanity to the environmental crisis we face nowadays, but she also shows that there are other ways of interacting with nature. Through Spinel's thoughts we can see the transition from one social system to the other, a process full of doubts and fears but with the successful ending of Spinel embracing a healthy way of life.

Both in *LB* and in *ADIO* we observe the evolution from an unhealthy social system to a healthy one. In the first novel, we see hoy construct children inherit the best genes—and values—of humans and the Oankali. These children are no longer hierarchical but they are able to feel the empathy the Oankali seem to be derpived of with their treatment of humans. Even though the Oankali more or less comply with ecofeminist values, they still perform certain oppressive practices that their hybrid progeny leave behind. In the case of *ADIO*, the evolution from an unhealthy social system to a healthy one is not undertaken by a whole group but only by one individual, Spinel. In both cases, the process of adaptation is not an easy one since characters have to sacrifice many things and they suffer the contempt of some of the members of their society. However, and despite the doubts and fears they feel in the process, Lilith—and all the other humans who accept the trade—and Spinel end up choosing a healthier lifestyle.

5.6.4 Ecofeminist Communities

As we have seen, both humans and the Oankali in *LB*, and Valans in *ADIO* are presented as unhealthy social systems with their oppressive attitudes towards the *other* and towards the environment. But Butler's hybrid future and Slonczewski's Sharers give readers hope in the sense that the authors offer alternative lifestyles that would enable us to leave behind power-over hierarchies and unsustainable habits that have, so far, resulted in social and environmental crises all around the world. These invented civilizations may be considered utopian and unreachable, but they still offer readers promising conceptual

frameworks based on ecofeminist values. These two healthy social systems are based on the belief that all individuals belong to a network of interdepedendent relationships, so the survival of a particular species depends on the well-being of the other species that make up the ecosystem, and of the habitat itself.

These societies seem to have been conceived following what ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant refers to as a partnership ethics, based on an equal status of all humans as well as of nonhuman nature, thus "eliminating the subordination and domination of oppressive social systems" (*Earthcare* 8). Then, this partnership model involves the harmonic and balanced coexistence of all species—human and nonhuman—with the environment surrounding them. This idea of a respectful coexistence among all living species, all of them enjoying an equal status, is also implicit in Lynn Margulis' idea of symbiogensis previously addressed when talking about the evolutionary process of human beings in *LB*. For Margulis, the idea that humans are the most evolved creatures of our world lacks any scientific support, and regarding this she writes: "All beings alive today are equally evolved. All have survived over three thousand million years of evolution from common bacterial ancestors. There are no 'higher' beings, no 'lower animals,' no angels and no gods" (Margulis 3). This same idea also appears in the article "God, Gaia and Biophilia" in which Margulis and her son Dorion Sagan write that we should think of humans as just another part of Gaia (351). Following this thought, Margulis believes that the similarities between human and non-human species are "far more striking than the differences" and so, our connections "should inspire awe, not repulsion" (Margulis 4). With these words, Margulis scientifically supports Mechant's idea that all living forms should have an equal status, thus challenging our conceptual paradigm.

In relation to the connectedness between life forms and to the equal status all living creatures should have, Merchant points out four important concepts that must be present in a partnership ethic: 1. Enquiry between the human and non-human communities. 2. Moral consideration for humans and non-human nature. 3. Respect for cultural diversity and biodiversity. 4. Inclusion of women, minorities, and non-human nature in the code of ethical accountability (*Earthcare* 217). As we can see, this ethic is based on the same ecofeminist ideas that Karen Warren and Val Plumwood defend in their writings; that is, harmony between human, human others, non-human others and nature. For the partnership model to succeed, all its members must recognize the interconnections among them and how they depend on each other for their survival.

Merchant is aware that the move from an anthropocentric model to an ecocentric one may be regarded as suspicious because of its utopianism; but she describes this model as

realistic because it includes "the idea that both the needs of nature and the basic needs of human beings have to be taken into account" (*Earthcare* 218). Taking into account human history, we can conclude that anthropocentrism and androcentrism—which have been prevalent for centuries—have proved disastrous if we consider the actual state of the environment, and how biodiversity and cultural diversity have been affected. Creating a model in which only the needs of the environment should be considered would fail just as anthropocentrism has failed because it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of human beings as part of the ecosystem of the Earth. So, for the partnership model to succeed it is necessary to avoid ideas such as anthropocentrism or ecocentrism, and to favor the dialogue between species and between these species and the environment.

Another social model based on the importance of a healthy and respectful relationship between humans and non-human natural is the organic community depicted by Murray Bookchin in his book *The Ecology of Freedom.* For this organic community to succeed, it should be small, and technology would be respectful with the environment, so solar and wind installations would be basic. Another important feature of this community would be its autonomy, since its inhabitant would survive thanks to organic gardens and by using local natural resources. Apart from focusing on technological and commercial aspects, Bookchin also analyzes the social and political features of this community, which would be based on decentralization and self-sufficiency and self-empowerment (2). In describing the social arrangement of this ecological community, Bookchin also takes into account one of the main ideas of ecofeminism: that in order to improve the relationship among humans and with the environment it is necessary to rethink our conceptual framework and turn it into a non-oppressive one. In order to achieve this, Bookchin believes that it is not enough "to remove the symptoms of our crises," but that we also need "to extirpate the hierarchical orientation of our psyches, not merely remove the institutions that embody social domination" (340).

The society presented at the end of *LB* can be closely related with the social models described by Merchant and by Bookchin. We can see human and nonhuman communities interacting with the breeding of construct children, but those living in trade villages also interact with other species by building structures with the sole contact of their skin—just as the Oankali do in their spaceships. Lilith's child Akin is able to recognize the beauty of diversity when he convinces the Oankali to allow humans to start a colony on Mars. Then, although cultural diversity is disregarded by the Oankali when they rescue humans, their hybrid children show their interest to know how humans used to live before the war. Regarding women and minorities, the resulting hybrid society regards difference as something

that must be preserved genetically, because the bigger the gene pool, the better. Therefore, the healthy system established by Butler at the end of the novel follows all the elements a partnership ethic must have in order to succeed.

This hybrid community has also many of the elements that Bookchin points out as essential in an ecological community. Considering technology, this future community portrayed by Butler does not use inorganic materials since all its structures and buildings, as well as the energy they use, are of organic origin. Instead of using inorganic materials like plastic, which would ultimately lead to the pollution of the soil, the air, as well as human beings, they are able to modify an organic substance that is both plant and animal; so that some sort of symbiotic relationship is established between them. Besides, the villages humans and Oankali start on Earth function in an autonomous way. Its inhabitants plant their food in organic gardens close to the village, just as Bookchin describes, so that they are self-sufficent. Regarding politics and the arrangement of society, these villages do not have a central government but they follow the decentralized model desired by Bookchin. This complete lack of hierarchies makes of Butler's community an ecological one, since it has been able not only to eliminate the institutions of social domination but also the oppressive frameworks of thought that support them.

For Karen Warren, in order to live according to ecofeminist principles we need to recognize our similarities and differences because this way "we will be poised to create genuinely respectful, nonviolent, care-based, intentional communities where commonalities and differences are just that—commonalities and differences" (*Ecofeminist* 204). The Oankali conception of the ecosystem as an interconnected web makes it possible for the aliens to lead humans to a more holistic view of the world thus erasing hierarchical thought. Because of their ability as genetic engineers, the Oankali are able to explore individuals in a deeper way, which enables them to perceive the common elements within all life forms, regardless of their different physical appearance. When the Oankali breed with humans a new hybrid species, this view of the natural word as an interconnected and interdependent network is transmitted to them. By recognizing this interdependence, construct children are able to perceive all living creatures in the same way, thus erasing the hierarchical bias that had lead their ancestors to their own destruction. Butler's hybrid community is thus presented as a utopian alternative to our world, a society that complies with Merchant's partnership model, Bookchin's ecological society and the ecofeminist principles postulated by authors like Karen Warren or Val Plumwood.

If we consider both Merchant's partnership ethics and Bookchin's organic community we can easily appreciate the numerous similarities between these two models and the Sharer community. In fact, Sharers' belief in the interconnectedness of life forms is at the core of these two models and is one of the main ecofeminist principles. Considering the elements of the partnership ethics Merchant proposes, we can conclude that Sharers comply with them. Their understanding in the interdependence of all the creatures of Shora allows them to morally consider both human and non-human organisms. This can be seen in the prayers they say when they feed on small animals. Their respect for cultural diversity and biodiversity is also evident in the novel. They do not impose their ways on Spinel and he only adopts them when he is ready and willing. Considering biodiversity, Sharers are quite aware of the need for survival of all the species so that the equilibrium of the ecosystem of Shora is maintained. Finally, their ethical code does account for women, minorities and non-human nature since they think that all the creatures of Shora have the same status. Although some Sharers disregard male Valans by saying that only inferior species have male members, this does not entail any type of oppressive attitude towards them, but just a desire for Valans to learn from Sharers that violence should be avoided.

Sharers also live according to the principles of Bookchin's organic community, as Edrie Sobstyl points out in her article: firstly, their society is clearly based on ecological principles. As many authors have commented, at the basis of ecology is the assumption that all forms of life are interdependent, interconnected and interrelated (Murphy, "Ecofeminist" 194; Plant, "Searching" 155; King, "Toward" 119). As commented before, this idea is at the core of Sharers' system of beliefs. Secondly, renewable energies are essential to Bookchin's imagined community and the only non-renewable energy Sharers use is that of the means of transport they take when they travel to another planet, because in their boats they have oars. In the novel, there is no other reference to Sharers' use of energy, but considering their organic technology, any energy used by Sharers is expected to be renewable. Thirdly, as Bookchin's says of his community, Sharers are autonomous in the sense that they survive with the animals they fish or the sea plant they take from the sea. For them, Shora provides anything they need to survive and this is true in the case of their food. Although they share their things with other rafts, Sharers are self-sufficient. In fact, they even make clothes out of seaweed and medicines from sea plants to trade with them. Fourthly, from a political point of view, Sharers also comply with Bookchin's statement that an organic community should be self-governed. Sharers have no central government and each raft is more or less autonomous. When they need to reach an agreement—as when they have to decide if they allow a couple to

have a child—they meet in a Gathering in which anyone can freely express her opinion. It is precisely this lack of government one of the things that distresses Valans the most because that means there is no leader to capture. Finally, one of the most important features of Bookchin's organic community is that it cannot support any kind of oppressive attitude. As we have seen in a previous analysis, Sharers' social system is a healthy one without any form of domination or subordination. One example of the lack of oppressive attitudes among Sharers is that they do not understand the idea of imposing one's will to another person. For this reason, when they are told to move away from the Valan headquarters, they remain where they are.

Apart from the analysis of Sharer's society using Merchant's and Bookchin's models of ecofeminist and/or ecological societies, there is another interesting aspect in which Sharers are representatives of ecofeminist ideas. According to Ynestra King, ecofeminist praxis is based on the use of alternative technologies—similar to what Bookchin says about the use of renewable energies—and in the exploration of "old and new forms of spirituality that celebrate all life as diverse expressions of nature, considering the ecological consequences of our lifestyles and personal habits, and participating in creative public forms of resistance" ("Toward" 125). Considering spirituality, we have seen that Sharers praise life for life's sake, as it happens when they talk about Shora as a sea of life where plants, fish and other creatures live. Sharers are also totally aware of the ecological consequences of their lifestyle and for this reason they avoid any action that would disturb Shora and/or its inhabitants. Finally, the ecofeminist idea of participating in public forms of resistance is also present in the novel. When Shora is invaded, Sharers protest publicly by sitting in front of the Valan headquarters but always with a non-violent behavior. Instead of opposing Valans by using plagues that could kill them, Sharers decide to respond Valans with non-violent civil disobedience.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this dissertation I stated that the main goal of this work was to explore the relationship between Science Fiction and ecofeminism in Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean.* The starting point was the idea that ecofeminism can benefit from Science Fiction works because their extrapolative nature enables authors to portray worlds that make readers reflect on their own reality. This process of reflection has mainly two objectives—which coincide with two ecofeminist goals: the first one is to recognize the weaknesses of our conceptual framework in terms of oppressive patterns and attitudes towards the *other*; and the second one is to realize that there are alternative lifestyles whose value systems include the belief in the interconnectedness of life and, as a consequence, healthier relationships with human and non-human others. In this sense, Butler's and Sonczewski's novels are quite interesting since the portrayal of two opposing civilizations—one human or human-like and the other alien—facilitates this process of reflection, whose consequences will be commented in this section.

If we consider the secondary goals that I proposed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the first issue to be analyzed was the representation of the natural world in the novels and the relationship between the characters and the environment surrounding them. As we have seen in the literary comment of the novels, both in *Lilith's Brood* and in *A Door into Ocean* the environment plays an important role in the development of the plot. The main point of contrast between the alien-like characters and those closer to humans in this respect is the very concept of nature. For the Oankali and Sharers nature is part of their daily life and it permeates their daily activities. The Oankali have established a chemically-symbiotic relationship with their spaceships and with their buildings whereas Sharers see nature as part of their own family. The interesting aspect of these two alien societies is that they do not distinguish between nature and culture since they see nature as part of their culture and the other way round. Besides, these two alien civilizations conceive nature and study nature in itself and not as a resource—even when they use it as a resource, we can perceive some sort of symbiotic process.

In contrast with this healthy relationship with nature we find Butler's humans and Slonczewski's Valans mirroring human practices such as exploitation and pollution. Butler's resister humans reject the environmentally-friendly lifestyle that the Oankali offer because they associate it with the aliens and they prefer to resume the way they lived before the war.

Nevertheless, some of Butler's humans—those who accept the trade—adopt the Oankali concept of nature by establishing organic communities. Similarly, Valans reflect human practices and attitudes, and they see nature as a resource and not as an entity in itself. We see in *ADIO* how Valans are criticized for their exploitation of natural resources to the verge of exhaustion and for their pollution of the sea of Shora. This clearly clashes with the alien image of the planets Chkahichdahk (*LB*) and Shora (*ADIO*) as independent beings often referred to as organisms rather than as dead bodies.

Two key concepts in the relationship of the Oankali and Sharers with the environment are those of interconnectedness and interdependence. On the one hand, these aliens believe that all forms of life are interconnected, which implies that even the smallest creatures play an essential role in the equilibrium of the ecosystem. On the other hand, the Oankali and Sharers recognize their dependence on the world they live in, thus acknowledging the intrinsic value of their respective habitats. These ideas contrast with the behavior of Butler's humans—who disregard the Earth by provoking a nuclear war and its subsequent nuclear winter—and with that of Valans—who see nature as a resource to be exploited and not as an entity on which they depend. These contrasting views of nature have also been one of the issues of debate in the ecofeminist movement. Ecofeminists have criticized the Western paradigm in which nature has been conceived as a passive entity, just as it happens with the human-like characters of Butler's and Slonczewski's novels. In contrast, ecofeminists propose a new way of conceiving nature based on the understanding of our place in nature, that is, that humans are just a link in the chain of life forms that make up the ecosystem of the Earth. For ecofeminists, in order to respect nature we need to understand that our survival depends on it, that it is part of ourselves as much as we are part of it, thus creating a cultural and biological bond.

The other relevant idea I want to comment on is that of the adaptation to nature. Throughout history humans have tried to manipulate and adapt nature for their own goals, thus disrespecting nature cycles and needs. This is more or less what Butler and Slonczewski reflect in their novels through their human-like characters. In this sense, it is especially significant how Valans pollute the sea of Shora in order to stop certain creatures that disturb them and complicate their situation on the ocean moon. In contrast, the Oankali and Sharers prefer to adapt their bodies to their habitat. Although we have commented that these alien species are sometimes manipulative with the world that surrounds them, my conclusion is that they try to adapt themselves to the environment rather than the other way round. For example, in *LB* we see how Jodahs is able to transform its body and adapt it to the habitat it is in, like

when his appearance becomes fish-like after spending some time in the water. In *ADIO* Sharers also interfere with nature, but without causing any harm at all. In spite of being powerful genetic engineers, Sharers do not use their knowledge to alter the habitat. They have left their bodies adapt to a marine environment instead of creating artificial surfaces that would have altered the equilibrium of Shora. Therefore, both the Oankali—especially construct children—and Sharers prefer to adapt to their surroundings rather than manipulate the environment to satisfy their needs, because their interference may result in unpredictable consequences.

Thus, Butler and Slonczewski use the character of the alien to reflect on the role of nature in our cultural paradigm. By opposing two different views of the natural world, they invite readers to reconsider our image of nature as a passive entity which we can manipulate for our needs. But they also offer readers an alternative system of values in which he environment is understood as part of the individual and the other way round. For ecofeminists, one of the main problems of our cultural paradigm in relation with nature is that we have stopped seeing ourselves as part of our ecosystem. Then, only by acknowledging our relationship with the natural world in terms of kinship and interconnectedness can we interact with nature in a healthy and respectful way, so we need to adapt our paradigm to our environment. Thus *LB* and *ADIO* work as experimental grounds on which ecofeminist conceptual frameworks are developed. This is one example of how the union of Science Fiction and ecofeminism may prove fruitful.

The following secondary objective focuses on how science and scientific research is represented in the novels. I wanted to analyze how the different ways of understanding science condition the relationship with the environment. Besides, one of the points I wanted to pay attention to was how the issue of genetic engineering was developed in these works. From my point of view, the most interesting aspect of the portrayal of science in the novels is that science is understood as part of everyday life and not as an elitist knowledge. This is due to the special abilities of these alien civilizations to perform genetic engineering. The Oankali are natural genetic engineers and their bodies have special limbs and organs that allow them to practice chemical transformations on other organisms. In fact, the Oankali interfere with genes because they need to do so, they need to mix their genes with other being's genes in order to evolve. In the case of Sharers, the ability to carry out genetic experiments is not natural but learned. They understand science as part of their culture and they use it to understand the world that surrounds them. It is precisely this deep scientific knowledge which

has enabled Sharers to understand the network that links all beings in Shora, thus enabling them to be environmentally aware of their role in the ecosystem.

Genetic engineering is one of the main topics in *LB* and in *ADIO* and both authors highlight its positive aspects by portraying how it can enhance human bodies for a better adaptation to the habitat. But Butler and Slonczewski—through the voice of some of their characters—also warn about the misuse of genetic experiments. Although the Oankali perform genetic engineering without causing any physical damage, they are not aware of the ethical or psychological implications of some of their practices. Through Lilith we see how informed consent becomes a key aspect in genetic manipulation, especially if we consider the process of sterilization to which all humans are subjected as a preventive measure. In *ADIO* Sharers continually warn about the fatal consequences of interfering with the environment. Even though they are able to carry out complex scientific and medical processes, they limit their actions to those whose results they can foresee.

At some points in the novels, mainly in *LB,* readers become especially aware of the ethical implications of genetic engineering. The experiments the Oankali carry out in humans are quite similar to those that humans have been performing on non-human animals. By including such unsettling situations for the reader, Butler wants us to reflect on the ethics of animal experimentation. In *LB* humans lose their superior status within the ecosystem since the Oankali displace them. Thus, humans are moved from their privileged position and this process of inferiorization in the hands of the aliens enables them to realize their weak situation. Besides, this inferior position of humans in the order of being is reinforced when humans are described as an arrangement of DNA that can be modified and mixed with other DNAs. Then, this deconstruction of humanity in chemical and biological terms shows that human beings are not more special—or more important—than other species, but just a part of the ecosystem, as ecofeminists and other environmentalists postulate.

Within the representation of science and of scientific experimentation in the novels, the issue of reproduction is worth mention. In both novels, the reproduction of the aliens is conceived as a scientific process rather than as an emotional and spontaneous one. In the case of the Oankali, the ooloi performs the chemical processes necessary for making the female pregnant by mixing the DNA of the male and the female with its own. Similarly, and because all Sharers are female, in *ADIO* reproduction is also understood as a programmed process. In this case, Sharers need the permission of the Gathering in order to become pregnant. Once the pregnancy is allowed, the lifeshaper performs the genetic and chemical operations needed and the chosen Sharer becomes pregnant. Therefore, in both novels reproduction becomes a

controlled and somehow artificial process. This birth control can be understood in terms of sustainability, since Sharers explicitly state that life on Shora is sustainable if the population of Sharers is stable. But even though pregnancy may seem a cold and distant procedure in the Oankali and Sharers societies, all the respective parents are highly implicated during the pregnancy, the birth and the child rearing.

Finally, I would like to point out one of the main features of alien scientific progress in both novels: its organicity. There is a clear contrast between the human—or human-like—characters and the alien ones in terms of their conception of progress. Butler's humans and Slonczewski's Valans understand scientific progress and progress in general as something inorganic, whereas the Oankali and Sharers associate scientific and technological developments with organic structures and materials. Humans and Valans judge how advanced a society is by the size and superficial complexity of its macrostructures, so when they notice the type of buildings and facilities these aliens have they do not realize how developed these civilizations are. Butler's humans are surprised by the simplicity of the buildings in trade villages, just as Valans misjudge Sharers' organic laboratories. With this organic portrayal of science and progress I think that Butler and Slonczewski highlight the idea that the progress of a society should be measured in terms of sustainability. These aliens understand that for a civilization to succeed it is necessary to develop a sustainable lifestyle that secures the survival of a species in particular habitat, thus also blurring the culture/nature dualism. This idea, which clearly echoes ecofeminist postulations, is the fundamental pillar on which the Oankali and Sharers have based their science.

In my introduction I asserted that my third secondary objective was the analysis of how gender issues are explored in *LB* and *ADIO*. In the case of *LB,* gender is one of the main themes since the author challenges the reader by presenting an alien species with three different sexes. Even though the ooloi seem to have a special status because of their role as heads of the family, there is no sex/gender discrimination among the Oankali. Besides, since the Oankali do not develop a particular sex until adulthood, there is no place for a gendered education so that children are raised in equal conditions. Apart from the lack of sex until adulthood, the dualism male/female is also challenged with the construct ooloi, who can change their appearance to satisfy others' desires. Jodahs is an example of this when it develops feminine attributes while it heals a male resister who is injured. Although its appearance is that of a woman, it is still an ooloi thus creating a fluid gender identity.

Slonczewski questions gender roles and patriarchal structures by focusing the novel on a female society. The author portrays a feminist utopia and how the Valan male Spinel is able

to adapt to Sharer lifestyle and to live according to traditional feminine values. Coming from a patriarchal society, Spinel becomes the *other* once he arrives at Shora, where both his origin and sex are seen with suspicion and sometimes even as a threat. Throughout the novel we see how Spinel rejects his Valan background to the extent that he realizes that he does not belong to Valedon when he travels there to visit his family. Even though it is not an easy decision, he chooses to embrace Sharer life because it is healthy, peaceful and respectful with otherness. Spinel's choice of a more feminine way of life contrasts with Jade, and especially with Nisi's behavior. Jade is described as a cold woman who disrespects Sharers for their otherness, unable to see how similar they are in biological and psychological terms. Her lack of empathy and compassion, and her authoritative and violent behavior make readers think of her in masculine terms, especially if we consider her total absence of consideration towards members of her own sex, as when she tortures Sharers. Similarly, there is a clear contrast between Spinel's development and Nisi's. Whereas Spinel embraces feminine values despite his Valan origin, Nisi ends up behaving violently and rejecting her Sharer education. These three examples illustrate how Slonczewski plays with gender values and roles. Spinel's evolution from a violent and resource-consuming culture to a pacifist and respectful one shows that traditional male and female values are cultural traits and as such, they can be learned.

Considering the issue of gender, the concept of family is also interestingly developed in these two novels. In *LB* and in *ADIO* we see different types of family that make us reflect on the very concept. In *LB* we see how resisters try to recreate the type of familial life they had before the war, but they fail because the process of sterilization makes it impossible for them to have children. The powerlessness of their situation makes of their family-like structures some kind of broken homes, a situation that drive some resisters to kidnap construct children in an attempt to recreate the traditional family. The other type of family structure that Butler portrays in her novel is the hybrid one, made up of both human and Oankali members. Lilith is one of the characters who are forced to reconsider the concept of family once she starts a new family—before the war she had a husband and a child. Lilith's new family includes three Oankali members—male, female and ooloi—a male human partner and a large number of children. Her first children are conceived using the sperm of Joseph, who was killed by the resisters before Lilith became pregnant the first time. Another interesting fact about the hybrid nature of these families is that all children share their human and Oankali parents, even though some are born to the human mother and others to the Oankali one. All the members of the family take part in child rearing, so their family ties are not only based in

biochemistry. In fact, the union of this type of family is so strong that Lilith comments that she had never felt such a bond, not even with her dead husband and son.

In *ADIO* there is also a revision of the concept of family. In Valedon, family structures resemble our own, but in Shora family units are different because of the absence of male Sharers. Sharers do not get married—no similar ritual is mentioned in the novel—but they form same-sex couples when they fall in love with another Sharer. Merwen and Usha are the most visible example of this since the novel is focused on them and on their natural and adopted offspring. With this normalization of same-sex couples and their children, Slonczewski seems to be acknowledging, and even supporting homosexual relationships. However, we cannot describe Sharers as homosexual but rather as bisexual, since they seem to be able to fall in love with another individual regardless of the sex. A clear example of this is Lystra, who after a failed relationship with another Sharer, ends up falling in love with Spinel. This lack of social constraints regarding relationships is also reflected in the families. Even though each family inhabits an independent raft, Sharer families help each other and cooperate. In this sense, Sharers can be described as a society in which communal values prevail over individual ones, as their gatherings show. Therefore, even though Sharers are organized in family units, important decisions such as the birth of a new Sharer are debated and agreed to.

As we have seen, gender is one of the themes portrayed in *LB* and in *ADIO*. Both Butler and Slonczewski question gender identities as biologically determined by playing with ambiguities and boundary-crossing. The first author challenges this assumption by problematizing the dualism male/female with the inclusion of a third sex and by questioning education in terms of gender. In the case of Slonczewski we see how a male individual embraces traditional feminine values because he finds himself more comfortable in a society based on respect and sharing. Regarding the concept of families, both authors highlight the importance of communal values and of alternative family structures that are adapted to the diversity portrayed in the novels. The normalization of these diverse family units can be interpreted as a vindication of the new family types that have proliferated in the last decades thanks to the still relative acceptance of non-traditional sexual orientations.

The analysis of the dualism human/alien as an extrapolation of the dualistic pair self/other was other of the secondary objectives of this dissertation. As it was mentioned in the chapter on SF theory, this genre can be understood as "the encounter with difference." Ecofeminism is also concerned with difference and with how the condition of the *other* has been used to justify the oppression and domination of certain social groups, non-human

animals and nature. Both Butler and Slonczewski explore the concept of otherness by portraying an alien society as opposed to a human or human-like one. The interesting aspect of these writers' approach is that they continually play with the boundary between human and alien so that readers can identify both with the characters in power and with those forced to a subjugated position. Then, Butler and Slonczewski make us reflect on our concept of otherness, how we deal with it and how we react when the status of the *other* is imposed on us.

In the section of this dissertation devoted to the analysis of the human/alien dualism we have seen that in *LB* and in *ADIO* the boundary between human and alien is characterized by fluidity. In *LB,* the key concept in the relationship between humans and the Oankali is that of hybridity, since the future of humanity seems to depend on alien genes. If we consider the events of the novel, the Oankali DNA is responsible for the lack of hierarchical behavior in construct children, a biological trait—according to the Oankali—that doomed human beings to extinction. But the inclusion of alien DNA also enables construct ooloi to have fluid identities, since they are able to adapt their anatomy depending on the demands of their surroundings or of their partners. These fluid identities contrast with the fixed categories of humans' conceptual framework in terms of race and gender, thus deconstructing dualistic pairs such as human/alien or male/female.

In the case of *ADIO* the boundary between human and alien is also blurred since both Valans and Sharers consider the other civilization as non-human. For Valans, Sharers are inferior creatures more similar to animals than to them, which is surprising since they belong to the same species. Similarly, Sharers think of Valans as children because of their violent behavior. The bridge between these two societies is crossed by two characters, Nisi and Spinel, but with different degrees of success. Whereas one would expect Nisi to adapt to Shoran society because of her gender and her upbringing on Shora, she ends up betraying Sharer values by using violence to repel Valans. However, Spinel, who has grown up in Valedon and whose gender makes of him the *other* among Sharers, is able to leave behind his Valan background and accept the healthier lifestyle of Sharers. With his decision of staying on Shora Spinel symbolizes the change of paradigm that ecofeminists and other environmentalists defend for human beings if we want to survive and protect our habitat.

Thus, both Butler's resisters and other human characters and Slonczewski's Valans represent human beings and their problematic system of values with respect to the *other,* especially if we consider the unsustainable treatment of nature. Both resisters' and Valans' conceptual frameworks are fatally flawed and it is obvious in the novels that their civilizations

will not be able to survive if they do not suffer some sort of internal transformation. In contrast with these two doomed systems, Butler and Slonczewski present alternative societies based on the acceptance of otherness and on the understanding of the interconnectedness of all lifeforms. Therefore, in these two novels aliens do not represent a real threat but only the possibilities of other lifestyles which are seen with suspicion. If we consider the endings of both novels—the success of the hybrid children and Spinel's decision to stay—we can conclude that both authors imply that our society's failure in its relationship with the *other* can only be redeemed by a complete transformation of what it means to be human. In the case of the construct children, we see that humans can only survive if the hierarchical trait is eliminated from their genes. However, in spite of their alien DNA, these construct children still retain some of the most typical human attitudes and feelings such as love and compassion. If we analyze Spinel's evolution, we see he crosses the human/alien boundaries several times, which enables him to embrace his otherness and to accept that his position in the ecosystem—as well as that of humans—is of equality with respect to any other species.

Therefore, in these novels the dualism human/alien help readers recognize the weaknesses and failures of our cultural value system in contrast with a healthier and more sustainable one. Besides, the authors play with the boundaries between the two elements of the dualism, thus inviting readers to identify with the *other*. It is precisely through this identification that we can perceive that the concept of otherness is culturally constructed and that, as such, it can certainly be deconstructed. In fact, both authors seem to advocate that the future of human beings depend on the acceptance of otherness as part of the self, because in so doing our society would be healthier and sustainable.

In relation to the acceptance of the *other* and to the oppression it has been subjected to, the last secondary objective of this dissertation was the analysis of *LB* and of *ADIO* from an ecofeminist perspective. The starting point of this dissertation was the analysis of how ecofeminism can benefit from literature, and especially from the genre of SF. I think that certain types of literary works illustrate ecofeminist ideas in such a way that readers become aware of the oppressive patterns that underlie our conceptual framework, the same oppressive patterns that prevent us from developing a more respectful and sustainable system of values. In a similar way, SF literature can benefit from an ecofeminist analysis because the presence of ecofeminist values—including the concern for environmental degradation and for the relationship with the *other*—proves that SF cannot be always described as escapist, and that it is focused on the present rather than on the future.

Through the contrast human/alien, Butler and Slonczewski explore two different civilizations with more or less opposing attitudes. In the case of Butler, we see that both the Oankali and humans develop unhealthy behaviors that result in oppression, violence and powerlessness. Even though the Oankali society is closer to the values postulated by ecofeminist theorists, some of their behaviors and practices become quite controversial from an ethical point of view. However, and as I commented previously in the section devoted to the ecofeminist analysis of the novels, it is the hybrid progeny that results from the Oankali-human trade which truly represents ecofeminist ideals. In Slonczewski's novel, the contrast between Valans and Sharers in terms of ecofeminist ideas is quite clear since Valans' violence and oppressive practices contrast with Sharers' pacifism and non-violent resistance. The key element in this novel is Spinel's evolution from Valan to Sharer. I think this evolution represents the change of paradigm that ecofeminists think necessary for humans to develop a healthier social system.

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, there are different ways in which the relationship between ecofeminism and SF has proved profitable with respect to promoting a more respectful attitude towards otherness, and towards nature in particular. For many ecofeminists, one of the key moments in human-nature history is the Scientific Revolution when nature started to be considered an object of study—and no longer a deity to be worshipped. For ecofeminist, and environmentalists in general, this objectification of the environment resulted in a total displacement of humans from nature, which has led to its exploitation and degradation. For this reason, many ecofeminists are quite negative with scientific research since they consider that nature is analyzed for human's sake, without taking into account its own needs. However, social ecofeminists offer a more positive view of science since they think that the same technology that has been used to destroy nature can be used to preserve it. It is precisely this hopeful concept of science and technology which I am interested in, since I think this is the view of scientific research that Butler and Slonczewski portray in their novels.

The portrayal of alien science in *LB* and in *ADIO* is characterized by its organic element. In *LB,* but to a greater extent in *ADIO*, scientific experiments are focused on improving living conditions without altering the balance of the ecosystem, which echoes the ecofeminist idea that a healthy social system must provide for human needs but also for the needs of human and non-human others. By offering such a portrayal of science and technology, Butler and Slonczewski seem to express that it is necessary for us to develop a more sustainable concept of scientific research able to respect the needs of all the elements in

an ecosystem. But this transformation of our idea of science is directly related with our displacement from nature. When the environment became an object of study, humans positioned themselves in a superior status over all the other creatures. As a result of this, humans do not see themselves as part of nature, what makes it easier for them to experiment with animals and to exploit nature without feeling any remorse. For this reason, in order to develop a new type of science we first need to undertake a shift in our cultural paradigm, which is characterized by a dangerous anthropocentrism—or androcentrism, for ecofeminists. In her article "Dissolving the False Divide: Literary Strategies for Re-Situating Humans Ecologically and Non-Humans Ethically," Carmen Flys comments precisely on this idea by stating that: "We need a culture that acknowledges our ecological embeddedness and dependence on the biosphere and which views non-human others in terms of ethics" (22). If we consider these words, we can conclude that if our cultural paradigm admits that humans are part of nature and not above it, scientific research will respond to this by considering non-human animals and nature as agents and not patients.

In the novels analyzed in this dissertation we have seen how the belief in the interconnectedness of life forms results in a sustainable and healthy social system. But in order to understand this interconnectedness and interdependence, the human or human-like characters of the novels need to go through a psychological—but also physical transformation—that positions them as the *other*. In the case of Lilith this process of transformation is forced on her, but both she and Spinel succeed in their adaptation to a new lifestyle. I think that by becoming the *other* in an alien civilization, Lilith and Spinel are able to see the ecosystem as a network to which they belong and not as an object to be dissected. This process of *otherization* is necessary for the characters' evolution because it positions them in a situation of powerlessness. Although Lilith and Spinel cannot be described as empowered individuals in their original societies—Lilith is an African American woman and Spinel belongs to a low social class—their situation of powerlessness within an alien society enables them to realize their true position in the order of being. Once Spinel and Lilith understand that humans are not the most important creatures in the universe and that life can continue without them, they are able to develop a new set of values based on the respect for otherness and for environmental wellness.

The movement from a position of power into one of powerlessness is the starting point in the transformation of these characters. Through the identification of readers with Lilith and Spinel, among others, Butler and Slonczewski seem to encourage us to question anthropocentrism and speciesism as unhealthy social systems doomed to fail. In turn, these

authors show readers the possibilities of a change of paradigm that would result in a respectful and sustainable lifestyle: that is, to favor ecocentrism rather than anthropocentrism/ androcentrism. One of the ways in which Butler and Slonczewski represent the need for a non-speciesist system of values is through characters that make us question the boundaries between human/animal/alien. In the case of *LB*, Butler imagines the future of humanity in the hands of a hybrid species, product of the Oankali-human trade. But this sustainable future involves many sacrifices for humans, who have to renounce to their superior status by embracing otherness. In *ADIO* Spinel's sacrifice is based on his situation among the Sharers as the *other*, until he finally accepts his otherness because it implies a better future and a healthier life. Considering this necessity of embracing otherness, Carmen Flys comments that in order to recognize "the continuity of the human and non-human and their interdependence we need to focus on our similarities rather than our differences, while accepting those differences and embracing the value of diversity and the intrinsic value of each species" (27). In these novels we have seen how the protagonists have become aware of their surroundings and of the value of the other elements they share the habitat with. Both the Oankali and Sharers, because of their special ability for genetic engineering, are able to appreciate biological diversity in itself, an appreciation of life that they teach human characters about.

To conclude this dissertation I would like to consider a quote that I find especially significant regarding the main goal of this dissertation, and because it links the message of both *LB* and *ADIO*. In a conference presentation by Joan Slonczewski about Butler's *LB* the author commented that "from the Oankali embrace of human cancer genes, Butler draws a broader message, that we humans need to embrace 'otherness' in ethnicities and cultures foreign to our own, even if at first they seem to violate our own values" (n.p.). Although this quote refers to Butler's work, it could be easily applied to Slonczewski's, since it highlights the idea that we should reconcile with otherness in all its forms, even if we initially see this as a threat or a danger as a result of our lack of understanding.

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze the ways in which SF and ecofeminism interact. Taking into account all the ideas exposed in this work we can conclude that the relationship between SF and ecofeminism could be described as symbiotic because they benefit from each other. Ecofeminist ideas—whether consciously or unconsciously present—make SF novels attractive to a broader audience by including issues previously forgotten in the genre. Besides, because of the "what if" component of SF, authors can explore alternative realities based on ecofeminist ideas, as Butler and Slonczewski do. This way, ecofeminism benefits from the limitless possibilities of SF, which allow authors to put into practice

ecofeminist values in the form of invented civilizations. Therefore, I would define the interaction of SF and ecofeminism as a literary symbiosis that encourages readers to envision a healthier future. Both Butler and Slonczewski use their works to explore the implications and results of a change of paradigm that entails leaving behind hierarchical thought and oppressive attitudes to favor interdependence, respect and sustainability. Both authors invite readers to reflect on the future of human beings, a future that depends on the redefinition of what it means to be human by embracing our own otherness and the otherness that surrounds us.

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VIII. SUMMARY IN SPANISH
RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

Esta tesis doctoral es el fruto de varios años de investigación sobre la ciencia ficción y la teoría ecofeminista, con el objetivo de establecer una relación fructífera entre ambas. Su origen se remonta a 2007, cuando participé en el curso de doctorado "Ecocrítica, ecofeminismo y justicia medioambiental", impartido por la Doctora Carmen Flys. Partiendo del Trabajo de Investigación Tutelado *"When they killed even to save life, they died a little themselves."An Ecofeminist Approach to Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis Series*, esta tesis explora cómo algunos trabajos de ciencia ficción feminista norteamericana promueven prácticas y actitudes respetuosas hacia el denominado *otro*. La literatura en general invita al lector a reflexionar sobre el mundo en que vivimos y, en particular, la ciencia ficción permite que esa reflexión se centre en las posibles consecuencias futuras de nuestras acciones presentes. La ausencia de límites espacio-temporales de la que disfrutan los escritores de ciencia ficción les permite especular con realidades imaginadas que actúan como espejo de nuestro mundo, de tal manera que los conflictos sociales y medioambientales de nuestra sociedad pueden extrapolarse a dichas realidades. De esta forma, el lector se convierte en un espectador ajeno a su propia realidad. Esta defamiliarización hace posible que el lector analice de forma crítica el sistema de valores que subyace la cultura en que se encuentra inmerso.

Debido a la importancia de la extrapolación en la ciencia ficción, las obras de este género a menudo se han convertido en vehículos de crítica social, como las novelas *1984* y *Rebelión en la granja*, por su tono anti-totalitarista. Por ello, no es de sorprender que la ciencia ficción se convirtiera en el medio de expresión elegido por muchas escritoras feministas para explorar y deconstruir el concepto de género, y experimentar en busca de otros sistemas sociales más igualitarios que el patriarcado del mundo occidental. La capacidad especulativa de la ciencia ficción es, por lo tanto, interesante desde una perspectiva ecofeminista porque las obras de este género a menudo imaginan sistemas sociales alternativos y más sanos de los que podemos aprender para transformar nuestra realidad. La filosofía ecofeminista parte de la idea de que el ser humano no ha sabido reconocer la gravedad de la crisis ecológica de nuestros días porque ya no nos sentimos parte de la naturaleza, a pesar de nuestra completa dependencia de ella. Los autores y autoras ecofeministas critican los patrones de dominación que han relegado a la mujer y la naturaleza,

así como al *otro* humano y no humano, a una posición secundaria en el mundo occidental, lo que está directamente relacionado con los problemas medioambientales presentes. Pero el ecofeminismo no sólo critica los sistemas sociales y los valores que promueven actitudes opresivas ya que también proponen modos de vida alternativos que lleven al ser humano a entender su lugar en el mundo natural y a respetar al *otro*.

El punto de partida de esta tesis es que tanto Octavia Butler como Joan Slonczewski usan la ciencia ficción para analizar nuestro sistema de valores, especialmente en lo que respecta al *otro*, al concepto de género y al medio ambiente. En este sentido, el aspecto más interesante de estas novelas es que ofrecen un contraste entre dos civilizaciones, una alienígena y otra humana, implicando así al lector en una reflexión que le lleve a cuestionar los valores que subyacen nuestro paradigma. La estrategia que ambas autoras usan para hacernos conscientes de las limitaciones y problemas de nuestra sociedad es la extrapolación de algunos conflictos de nuestro mundo a una realidad alternativa de la que el lector se convierte en observador. De esta manera, Butler y Slonczewski analizan, y critican a través de la voz de sus personajes, aquellas prácticas y actitudes que consideran peligrosas y dañinas en la relación con el *otro*, cumpliendo así una de las metas del ecofeminismo. Además de la crítica de patrones opresivos, el otro objetivo principal de los y las ecofeministas es el de proponer y promover otros paradigmas culturales que rechacen la valoración jerárquica de la sociedad, y que en su lugar se basen en el cuidado y el respeto. En sus obras, Butler y Slonczewski también "cumplen" con este objetivo ecofeminista ya que imaginan civilizaciones que creen en la interconexión y la interdependencia de los seres vivos, y que por ello desarrollan formas de vida respetuosas con el *otro*, tanto humano como no humano.

Teniendo en cuenta toda lo expuesto, esta tesis tiene por objetivo explorar los beneficios de establecer una relación entre la ciencia ficción y el ecofeminismo en *Lilith's Brood* de Octavia Butler y en *A Door into Ocean* de Joan Slonczewski. En concreto, mi interés se centra en cómo las dos autoras analizan el paradigma cultural de nuestra sociedad al oponerlo con el de una sociedad alienígena cuyos valores se asemejan a los propuestos por autores y autoras ecofeministas. De esta manera, las autoras no sólo observan críticamente los fallos y deficiencias de nuestros comportamientos hacia el *otro*, humano y no humano, sino que también presentan estilos de vida alternativos. Por ello, el estudio literario de las novelas se hace con un enfoque ecofeminista que analiza diversos aspectos relacionados con este movimiento filosófico. El análisis temático se centra en la representación del medio ambiente en las novelas pero también en cómo los protagonistas se relacionan con su entorno. La ciencia es el tercer aspecto analizado, con especial interés en los diferentes conceptos de

ciencia de las sociedades humanas y alienígenas de estas obras. En cuarto lugar, el análisis se centra en cómo las novelas exploran la idea de género y su implicación en las conductas opresivas. Finalmente, y aunque en algunos de los temas anteriores hay aspectos que son importantes para este último apartado, la parte final del análisis de las novelas está dedicada a la aplicación de teorías y conceptos ecofeministas a las dos obras.

Como he comentado anteriormente, esta tesis parte de la idea de que la ciencia ficción a menudo ha sido utilizada como vehículo de crítica social. Aunque el género no siempre ha gozado de buena fama debida a la relativa calidad de algunas de sus obras, sobre todo aquellas catalogadas bajo el nombre de "pulp science fiction", el gran número de escritores de renombre que en algún momento han escogido este género para expresarse, así como la intersección entre ciencia ficción y posmodernismo, han hecho que la ciencia ficción se haya ganado un lugar en el mundo académico. Son muchos los autores que han demostrado que el apelativo "escapista" tan a menudo usado para referirse a este género, no puede ser aplicado sino por aquellos no familiarizados con la naturaleza de la ciencia ficción. En este sentido, el concepto de alienación y el de extrapolación cobran un papel importante, ya que ambos están relacionados con la idea de que muchas obras de ciencia ficción llevan un mensaje que sólo puede ser descodificado por el lector cuando éste se convierte en observador externo y cuando es capaz de ver el reflejo de su mundo en la realidad representada en la obra.

La ciencia ficción feminista ha sido uno de los subgéneros de mayor importancia por la relevancia de las obras catalogadas bajo esta etiqueta y por el vasto número de autoras reconocidas que han escrito novelas y relatos de este tipo, como Ursula LeGuin o Margaret Atwood. Para las escritoras de ciencia ficción feminista, el género ofrece las herramientas necesarias para diseñar un mundo que se adecúe a sus expectativas, dejando atrás el patriarcado, y experimentando así con otros paradigmas socioculturales. Dentro de este subgénero son de especial relevancia las utopías feministas ya que son experimentos literarios de sociedades matriarcales. Aunque existen utopías feministas en las que la presencia de hombres es inexistente o vetada, existen otras utopías, como la de las Sharers en *A Door into Ocean* en las que la presencia de hombre no está mal vista e incluso se aprende de ella. Este segundo tipo de utopía feminista es especialmente interesante porque permite el diálogo entre miembros de diferente sexo, y nos lleva a cuestionar el concepto de género y los valores tradicionalmente adscritos a cada género.

Dentro de la ciencia ficción feminista cabe destacar la importancia de personajes como el cyborg, el robot o el alienígena como metáfora del *otro*, lo que convierte a estos personajes en objeto de interés ecofeminista. Por ejemplo, en muchas obras la relación entre el humano y

el alienígena refleja la relación de los humanos hacia el *otro,* tanto humano como no humano, lo que permite a muchos autores usar sus obras para explorar las raíces de la discriminación y de las conductas opresivas. El uso de civilizaciones alienígenas opuestas a otras humanas también ofrece la posibilidad de representar sistemas de valores alternativos a los de nuestra sociedad, estableciendo un contraste que lleva al lector a reconocer de forma crítica los fallos de nuestro paradigma cultural, sobre todo en lo referente a la relación con el *otro.*

En relación con la representación de la alteridad en ciencia ficción, y teniendo en cuenta el enfoque usado en esta tesis, la naturaleza juega un papel importante ya que una de las premisas del ecofeminismo es que el ser humano se ha distanciado tanto de su entorno que éste ha pasado a convertirse en el *otro.* Si la ciencia ficción es un vehículo de crítica social y sirve para hablar del encuentro con la alteridad, es interesante destacar la creciente relevancia del mundo natural en este género, a menudo como forma de promover una conciencia ecológica. Son varios los autores que señalan la importancia de la temática medioambiental en las obras de ciencia ficción de las últimas décadas, especialmente en aquellas que retratan mundos postapocalípticos y distopías producto de la degradación del entorno natural. En el caso de las novelas analizadas en esta tesis, tanto *Lilith's Brood* como *A Door into Ocean* permiten al lector observar de primera mano los desastres medioambientales fruto de las acciones contaminantes y violentas del ser humano. De esta manera, estas obras se convierten en advertencias sobre las posibles consecuencias dañinas de nuestra manipulación del medio ambiente, involucrando al lector de forma directa por su identificación con los protagonistas. Pero muchas de estas obras son también importantes porque no sólo exploran los posibles efectos de la degradación medioambiental, sino porque también retratan formas alternativas de relacionarse con la naturaleza basadas en el respeto y en el concepto de interdependencia.

Como podemos ver, existen diversos aspectos en el género de la ciencia ficción susceptibles de ser analizados desde una perspectiva ecofeminista, y por ello opté por usar tal enfoque para realizar un análisis temático de ambas novelas. El ecofeminismo surge como un movimiento filosófico en Francia, aunque en otros países como Estados Unidos y la India el está ligado al activismo y tiene una vertiente más práctica. La premisa principal del ecofeminismo es que mujer y naturaleza, en su condición de *otro* en las sociedades patriarcales occidentales, han sido oprimidas y sujetas a patrones de dominación. Pero el ecofeminismo no se limita a establecer vínculos entre mujer y naturaleza en términos de dominación, sino que también reconoce la opresión a la que han sido sometidos aquellos seres humanos y no humanos catalogados bajo la etiqueta de *otro,* como las minorías étnicas o los animales entre otros. Analizando diversos/as autores/as ecofeministas, podemos definir dos

objetivos principales del ecofeminismo. En primer lugar, el ecofeminismo busca identificar y criticar actitudes y comportamientos opresivos hacia el denominado *otro,* analizando el paradigma cultural que favorece dicha dominación. En segundo lugar, y para complementar el primer objetivo, los/as autores/as ecofeministas usan sus obras para proponer e imaginar formas alternativas de relacionarse con el *otro*. Esta ética ecofeminista se basa en el respeto y el entendimiento que nacen de la idea de que todos los seres vivos están interconectados y que son, por lo tanto, mutuamente interdependientes.

Dentro del ecofeminismo podemos encontrar varias tipos cuyas diferencias radican en su forma de entender la lucha de mujer y naturaleza, pero que coinciden en la idea principal de que todos aquellos denominados *otro,* han sido oprimidos según los mismos patrones de dominación, por lo que deben aunar esfuerzos para lograr su liberación. De los diferentes tipos de ecofeminismo que existen, para esta tesis doctoral he optado por utilizar ideas del ecofeminismo social, representado por figuras como Karen Warren o Val Plumwood. Los/as ecofeministas sociales reconocen las diferencias entre hombres y mujeres pero no comparten que se usen para justificar la opresión de éstas. El ecofeminismo social postula que la liberación de la mujer y de la naturaleza debe basarse en la participación activa de las mujeres en la vida pública. Otra característica relevante del ecofeminismo social es que mientras que algunos tipos de ecofeminismo son eminentemente anti-científicos y anti-tecnológicos, éste defiende la idea de que la misma ciencia que se ha usado para explotar la naturaleza puede ser usada para conservarla.

Como cualquier otro movimiento filosófico, el ecofeminismo no está exento de detractores aunque entre las críticas destaca la "ecología profunda". Aunque el ecofeminismo y la "ecología profunda" comparten el objetivo de la liberación de la naturaleza, ofrecen diferentes aproximaciones. La "ecología profunda" critica el ecofeminismo porque en su interés por la liberación del *otro,* los intereses medioambientales parecen pasar a un segundo plano. En respuesta, los/as ecofeministas comentan que debido a las asociaciones y vínculos entre mujer y naturaleza, es imposible entender la liberación de una sin que implique la de la otra. Otra de las críticas más comunes al ecofeminismo es la de su carácter esencialista. Si bien es cierto que dentro del ecofeminismo hay autoras que se centran en la relación de mujer y naturaleza en lo referente a su capacidad reproductiva, la mayoría de las variantes ecofeministas basan la relación de la mujer y la naturaleza en su situación de oprimidas en el paradigma patriarcal occidental.

Si analizamos la relación entre mujer y naturaleza es interesante hacer mención a la hipótesis de Gaia de James Lovelock. Con esta hipótesis el científico James Lovelock se

refiere a la Tierra con el nombre de Gaia y postula que el planeta funciona como un organismo vivo que resulta de la unión de los seres vivos que lo forman. Esta idea está claramente relacionada con los conceptos ecofeministas de interconexión e interdependencia ya que establece científicamente que las acciones de seres que habitan la Tierra tienen influencia sobre el bienestar del planeta. Aunque algunos/as ecofeministas encuentran la asociación del planeta con una deidad femenina algo positivo ya que en las sociedad matriarcales antiguas la naturaleza era objeto de adoración, existen muchos detractores de la teoría de Lovelock por varios motivos. En primer lugar, muchos ecologistas rechazan la hipótesis de Lovelock porque ésta establece que la Tierra siempre será capaz de recuperarse y volver a la estabilidad, sin importar el grado de degradación de la naturaleza. Esta afirmación resulta controvertida ya que implica que no es necesario ser respetuoso con el medio ambiente y que nuestras acciones dañinas y contaminantes no son peligrosas. En segundo lugar, algunos/as ecofeministas piensan que la asociación de la Tierra con Gaia es perjudicial para ambas ya que perpetúa la visión de la naturaleza como una entidad femenina pasiva.

Como se ha comentado anteriormente, uno de los principales objetivos del ecofeminismo es analizar las actitudes opresivas y explorar las similitudes entre los patrones de dominación hacia el *otro.* En su análisis de los paradigmas culturales opresivos, Karen Warren destaca varios elementos relacionados entre sí. En primer lugar, el pensamiento jerárquico según el cual los elementos en los niveles superiores de la jerarquía tienen más valor que los situados en los niveles más bajos. En segundo lugar, los dualismos en los que uno de los elementos aparece opuesto, y superior, al otro. En tercer lugar, en los paradigmas opresivos el poder se entiende como "poder sobre", por lo que los individuos que ocupan los niveles bajos de la jerarquía son dominados por los de los niveles superiores. Por último, los paradigmas opresivos fomentan la lógica de la dominación, una estructura lógica de argumentación que justifica la dominación y la subordinación. Precisamente es esta lógica de dominación la que muchos ecocríticos y ecofeministas señalan como la base de la opresión basada en la etnia, la orientación sexual, la clase, la especie o el género. Si aplicamos estas ideas a la explotación de mujer y naturaleza vemos cómo ambas han sido concebidas como opuestas al hombre, colocándolas en una posición secundaria y en un rol pasivo. Además, la asociación entre mujer y naturaleza por su capacidad de dar vida ha sido utilizada para justificar su opresión y para perpetuar su posición inferior con respecto al hombre.

En su análisis de una lógica de la dominación, Val Plumwood destaca cinco actitudes que se repiten en todos los comportamientos opresivos. El primero es *backgrounding* ("relegación"), y consiste en que el elemento superior usa al inferior pero sin reconocer su

dependencia en éste, negando así su importancia intrínseca. Un ejemplo claro de este comportamiento es la esclavitud, ya que la riqueza de los amos dependía del trabajo de sus esclavos pero este trabajo no se reconocía. El segundo elemento es la hiperseparación, en la que el miembro superior no reconoce las similitudes con el miembro inferior, excluyéndolo y convirtiéndolo en el *otro.* Al comparar uno con el otro, el superior se centra sólo en lo que los distingue en vez de en las características compartidas. La hiperseparación puede percibirse en la relación de los humanos con los animales no humanos cuando ésta se centra en la capacidad de raciocinio presente en unos y ausente en otros, en vez de reconocer características comunes como los instintos. En la incorporación o identidad relacional, el tercer elemento, en grupo inferior sólo existe en la medida que se le relaciona e identifica con el grupo superior, lo que conlleva la pérdida de la identidad del *otro.* La cuarta actitud presente en una lógica de dominación es el instrumentalismo u cosificación. El instrumentalismo consiste en tratar al *otro* como un objeto y su existencia se basa en satisfacer las necesidades del miembro superior. Por ejemplo, en las sociedades antropocéntricas la naturaleza se ha convertido en una cosa que se puede explotar sin tener en cuenta su bienestar, y lo mismo puede decirse de los animales utilizados en experimentos científicos. En último lugar, la homogenización implica que todos los miembros del grupo inferior son considerados iguales, perdiendo su individualidad y convirtiéndose en un grupo de elementos intercambiables sin valor intrínseco.

La lógica de la dominación, así como las otras actitudes opresivas mencionadas anteriormente, está presente en cualquier sistema social insalubre. Para Warren, un sistema social es insalubre si se caracteriza por la rigidez y si sus normas y roles vienen determinadas por una jerarquía en la que los que ocupan los niveles superiores ejercen el poder sobre aquellos en los niveles inferiores. Por el contrario, en un sistema social sano el poder conlleva negociación y diálogo, y el bienestar y las necesidades de todos los individuos se tienen en cuenta. Teniendo en cuenta estas definiciones, el ecofeminismo busca criticar y denunciar los sistemas sociales insalubres con el fin de reformarlos para que pasen a ser sanos. Este cambio de paradigma conlleva un cambio en el sistema de valores, reemplazando la rigidez, la dominación, la explotación y la violencia, por ideas como la diversidad, la cooperación, la sostenibilidad y el respeto. Existen varios modelos éticos que recogen los valores que caracterizarían una sociedad ecofeminista. Una sociedad de este tipo estaría basada en los conceptos de interdependencia e interconexión, por lo que el bienestar de todos sus elementos se tendría en cuenta. En vez de un ordenamiento jerárquico, el poder se repartiría de manera heterárquica y la negociación y el diálogo serían piezas clave. Al tener por objetivo la

satisfacción de tanto los habitantes humanos como los no humanos, se deja atrás el antropocentrismo sin llegar a adoptar un modelo exclusivamente ecocéntrico.

Las obras literarias analizadas en esta tesis reflejan de cierta forma los dos objetivos principales del ecofeminismo. Por un lado, *Lilith's Brood* y *A Door into Ocean* reflejan conductas opresivas y actitudes propias de la lógica de la dominación mientras que exploran los valores que subyacen tales comportamientos. Por otro lado, y estableciendo así un contraste, estas novelas también retratan civilizaciones alienígenas basadas en aquellos valores que los/as ecofeministas reconocen como esenciales para que una sociedad pueda considerarse sana. Aunque probablemente las autoras Octavia Butler y Joan Slonczewski no estaban familiarizadas con la filosofía ecofeminista cuando escribieron estas obras, si analizamos ciertos detalles de sus biografías, y teniendo en cuenta el momento en que las novelas fueron escritas, podemos entender que ideas como las sostenibilidad, el ecologismo y el respeto al *otro* jueguen un papel importante.

Octavia Butler, que procedía de una familia humilde y eminentemente matriarcal, reflejó en sus obras los problemas del momento en que vivió y su forma de pensar con respecto a estos. La primera parte de *Lilith's Brood* se publicó en 1987, cuando se vivían los últimos años de la Guerra Fría en los que el presidente Ronald Reagan animaba al desarrollo nuclear. En una entrevista Butler reconoció que no entendía cómo la gente podía aceptar la idea de que las armas nucleares harían el mundo más seguro, y eso le llevó a pensar que existía algún problema en el ser humano como especie. Este pesimismo hacia ciertos comportamientos humanos aparece en *Lilith's Brood*: desde la guerra nuclear que coloca a los humanos en una situación difícil, hasta el desarrollo violento y opresivo de algunos de los personajes de la novela. Asimismo cabe destacar la importancia del mundo natural en la obra de Butler. Aunque en la serie *Parable* la preocupación de Butler hacia la degradación medioambiental es más evidente, en *Lilith's Brood* la autora también muestra las devastadoras consecuencias para la naturaleza de algunas prácticas humanas. Finalmente, y quizá influida por su condición de mujer afroamericana, en *Lilith's Brood* Butler analiza la identidad del *otro* y los límites de la alteridad a través de la metáfora del alienígena.

A Door into Ocean de Joan Slonczewski se publicó en 1986, un año antes que la primera parte de *Lilith's Brood*, por lo que no es de extrañar que existan similitudes entre ambas obras. Pese a que Slonczewski viene de un entorno completamente distinto al de Butler, y que su obra está muy influida por su formación académica en ciencias, ambas autoras hablan de los mismos temas: conflictos bélicos, el encuentro humano-alienígena y la degradación del medio ambiente. En general las obras de Slonczewski tienen un fuerte

componente ecologista, resultado de su carrera como bióloga y de la religión cuáquera que profesa. Pero sus obras también analizan la identidad del *otro* estableciendo un continuo diálogo entre los diferentes personajes, lo que permite a los lectores contemplar diferentes puntos de vista. Como en el caso de Butler, la frontera entre humano y alienígena es a menudo confusa, lo que ayuda a observar de forma crítica cuáles son los valores que contaminan nuestro paradigma cultural haciéndolo insalubre.

Por todo lo expuesto anteriormente, *Lilith's Brood* y *A Door into Ocean* ejemplifican la forma en que la ciencia ficción puede "poner en práctica" los valores ecofeministas y así promover un cambio de paradigma que conlleve la desaparición de actitudes opresivas en favor de comportamientos más respetuosos hacia el medio ambiente y hacia el denominado *otro.* En esta tesis doctoral, y usando como marco teórico los trabajos de diversos/as autores/as ecofeministas, principalmente Karen Warren y Val Plumwood, se lleva a cabo un comentario extenso temático abarcando diversos aspectos relacionados con el *otro* (medio ambiente, ciencia, género, dualismo humano/alienígena) para terminar con una reflexión desde un enfoque ecofeminista. Con este análisis mi objetivo es ver cómo la ciencia ficción da cabida a la necesidad de replantearse los valores de nuestra sociedad con el fin de transformar nuestro paradigma cultural y desarrollar nuevos valores más respetuosos y sostenibles. De esta forma, y en relación con el título de esta tesis, podremos explorar la re-definición de humanidad que estas autoras ofrecen en sus obras.

Como se ha comentado previamente, uno de los principales temas de estas obras es el encuentro con el *otro* y cómo las autoras juegan con la barrera entre lo humano y lo alienígena. Este aspecto temático también se refleja en la forma en que las novelas están escritas, es decir, las propias voces narrativas representan la alteridad. La historia de *Lilith's Brood* está dividida en tres partes y cada una de estas partes tiene un narrador diferente. La primera parte, narrada en tercera persona, se centra en la protagonista Lilith Iyapo dando voz tanto a sus acciones como a sus pensamientos y emociones. A través de este personaje humano en manos de una sociedad alienígena, los lectores se vuelven conscientes de la vulnerabilidad y de la impotencia del denominado *otro.* En la segunda parte de *Lilith's Brood* volvemos a encontrar un narrador omnisciente pero esta vez focalizado en Akin, uno de los hijos híbridos de Lilith. Desde Akin también percibimos la situación del *otro* ya que al ser híbrido su identidad es parcialmente humana, parcialmente alienígena. Akin es un personaje relevante porque intercede por los humanos ante los Oankali, logrando para los primeros la posibilidad de vivir de forma independiente estableciendo una colonia en Marte. En la tercera parte de la novela Butler opta por un narrador de primera persona centrado en la figura de

Jodahs, otro de los hijos de Lilith, y el primer ooloi nacido de una madre humana y no Oankali. El uso de la primera persona hace que el lector se identifique más fácilmente con el protagonista, que es quien mejor representa la idea de alteridad por su capacidad de adaptar su físico al entorno. Por lo tanto, en *Lilith's Brood* la evolución del ser humano en una especie híbrida también aparece reflejada en la elección de las voces narrativas. Por su situación en el desarrollo de la novela, los tres personajes representados por los narradores continuamente cambian la perspectiva del *otro,* redefiniendo una y otra vez la frontera entre lo humano y lo alienígena, entre el ser y el *otro.*

En *A Door into Ocean* encontramos un narrador en tercera persona focalizado en cinco personajes diferentes, por lo que la narración se encuentra dividida en cinco puntos de vista diferentes: Merwen, Spinel, Berenice/Nisi, Lystra y Realgar. Al usar estas cinco perspectivas, Slonczewski permite que el lector se identifique con cinco sujetos diferentes, comprendiendo así la identidad del *otro* y su trato por parte de los personajes que ostentan el poder sobre ellos. Con estas perspectivas cambiantes podemos ver cómo los personajes se ven a sí mismos y cómo los otros personajes los perciben. Esto es especialmente interesante si nos centramos en las dos civilizaciones descritas en la novela, ya que los Valans ven a las Sharers como criaturas inferiores por sus características animales, y las Sharers piensan que los Valans se comportan como niños y que necesitan compartir conocimientos. Los cinco puntos de vista desde los que se narra *A Door into Ocean* nos ayudan a profundizar en el tratamiento del *otro* para analizar las actitudes que subyacen los comportamientos opresivos, pero también para imaginar otros paradigmas en los que la alteridad no se considera una amenaza sino una riqueza.

Continuando con el comentario temático de las novelas, el primer tema a tener en cuenta por su relevancia en ambas obras es el medio ambiente, cómo éste aparece representado y cuál es la relación de los personajes con el entorno que los rodea. Tanto en *Lilith's Brood* como en *A Door into Ocean* el medio ambiente juega un papel importante en el desarrollo de la historia, especialmente porque es uno de los elementos en los que difieren las sociedades humanas y las sociedades alienígenas retratadas. Por una parte, los humanos que describe Butler han llevado el planeta a un invierno nuclear sin considerar las consecuencias que tal catástrofe tiene para el ecosistema. No obstante, los humanos que aceptan a los Oankali aceptan también su concepto de naturaleza y establecen con ellos comunidades orgánicas con huertos autosuficientes. De igual manera, los Valans de los que habla Slonczewski – cuya sociedad comparte muchas características con la nuestra – consideran el medio ambiente como un objeto a explotar para obtener sus recursos sin tener en cuenta la

degradación medioambiental y la contaminación que conlleva. Por otra parte, tanto los Oankali como las Sharers desarrollan una actitud respetuosa hacia el medio ambiente, del que se sienten parte ya que creen en la interdependencia e interconexión de todos los seres vivos que lo forman. Para estas dos sociedades alienígenas la naturaleza es parte de su rutina diaria ya que sus conocimientos científicos les permiten entender su lugar en el ecosistema. Los Oankali han llegado a establecer una relación simbiótica-química con sus naves y sus edificios. Por su parte, las Sharers perciben el planeta Shora como parte de su propia familia. Es interesante destacar que tanto los Oankali como las Sharers no hacen distinción entre cultura y naturaleza, uno de los dualismos más problemáticos en nuestro paradigma cultural, porque la naturaleza es parte de su cultura y viceversa.

Los dos conceptos más importantes en la relación de los Oankali y las Sharers con el medio ambiente son interconexión e interdependencia. Estas sociedades alienígenas se caracterizan por sus amplios conocimientos científicos, que han ido adquiriendo por curiosidad más que por un deseo de control del mundo natural, lo que les permite comprender que los ecosistemas funcionan como una red en la que todas las formas de vida están interconectadas. El concepto de interconexión es esencial en la filosofía ecofeminista e implica que si el ser humano entendiera el funcionamiento del planeta y su posición en éste, seríamos capaces de concebir la naturaleza como parte de nosotros, y viceversa, y no como una entidad que nos es ajena. La idea de interconexión refuerza el concepto de biodiversidad ya que si todas las especies están conectadas, la extinción de especies es una amenaza directa al equilibrio de nuestro ecosistema. Por eso, para los/as ecofeministas es esencial que el ser humano entienda que su supervivencia depende del planeta y de las especies que lo avisan, creando así un vínculo no sólo biológico sino también cultural con el entorno.

La interdependencia es otra idea esencial en la relación Oankali y Sharers con la naturaleza, ya que ambas sociedades reconocen que su supervivencia sería imposible sin el hábitat en el que viven. Esto contrasta con la filosofía de vida de los humanos retratados por Butler y de los Valans. Los primeros prácticamente destruyen el planeta, y todas las especies que lo habitan, en un intento de aniquilar la vida humana. De esta forma Butler no sólo critica lo absurdo del uso suicida de armas nucleares, sino que también se centra en las consecuencias nefastas para el medio ambiente de este tipo de armamento. Por su parte, los Valans basan su economía en la explotación de recursos naturales, especialmente si se trata de minerales ya que los usan para la arquitectura, los vehículos especiales y la industria robótica. Tal y como una de las protagonistas Sharer critica, la filosofía de los Valans se basa en

explotar un planeta hasta agotar sus recursos para pasar al siguiente mundo colonizado y así sucesivamente.

Tanto los humanos descritos anteriormente como los Valans muestran una total falta de conciencia ecológica que nace de su incapacidad de entender hasta qué punto su supervivencia depende del mundo que se dedican a destruir lentamente. Estos comportamientos contrastan claramente con las prácticas de las sociedades alienígenas con las que se encuentran enfrentados de una forma u otra. Las Sharers son especialmente sensibles a la idea de interdependencia ya que para ellas el equilibrio del ecosistema es esencial. Por eso, conocen muy bien los límites y sacrificios que son necesarios para que su forma de vida sea sostenible y no perturbe la estabilidad del sistema de Shora. En la novela son varios los ejemplos que nos muestran la firme creencia de las Sharers en la interdependencia pero podemos destacar dos. En primer lugar, y aunque muchas Sharers son vegetarianas, cuando consumen peces o pulpos honran su muerte como si se tratara de la de un miembro de su familia porque es así como conciben a las demás criaturas que habitan el planeta. Pese a que se alimentan de ellas, igual que otras criaturas atacan a las Sharers siguiendo la cadena alimenticia, estas alienígenas reconocen que sobreviven gracias a la muerte de estos seres. El segundo ejemplo en el que percibimos la idea de interdependencia es cuando renuncian a crear una plaga que aleje a los temidos s*easwallowers* porque saben que eso desestabilizaría el ecosistema y las consecuencias para las demás criaturas y para el propio planeta serían imprevisibles.

Otra de las ideas clave en las conclusiones es la habilidad de adaptarse al entorno. A lo largo de la historia, el ser humano siempre ha intentado manipular la naturaleza y adaptarla a sus necesidades y objetivos sin tener en cuenta las posibles consecuencias, y sin considerar las propias necesidades del medio ambiente. Este es precisamente uno de los temas que Butler y Slonczewski critican a través de los personajes humanos, o casi humanos, que retratan en sus obras. Un ejemplo significativo es la decisión de los Valans de usar una plaga contaminante en el océano de Shora para detener el avance destructor de los *seaswallowers* porque las criaturas dificultan su conquista del planeta. Esta falta de consideración por las necesidades del propio ecosistema contrasta con la adaptabilidad de los Oankali y las Sharers. En el caso de los Oankali, su intercambio genético con los humanos permite que los ooloi desarrollen la capacidad de alterar su apariencia para adaptarse al entorno, como crecer branquias si pasan mucho tiempo en un medio acuático. De forma similar, durante siglos la anatomía de las Sharers también ha sufrido un proceso de adaptación al hábitat de Shora, haciendo que su apariencia sea menos humana y más animal a los ojos de los Valans. Por ejemplo, pierden el

vello corporal después de nacer porque eso facilita que puedan nadar, y por esa misma razón los dedos de sus manos y pies tienen una membrana que hace que se asemejen a una aleta. Pese a la capacidad de las Sharers de llevar a cabo experimentos genéticos y biomédicos, prefieren que su cuerpo se adapte poco a poco al medio marino del planeta antes que modificarlo y terraformarlo.

Por lo tanto, Butler y Slonczweski usan el alienígena, uno de los personajes clásicos de la ciencia ficción, y lo convierten en una criatura casi ejemplar en su relación con el medio ambiente, haciendo que reflexionemos sobre el lugar que el concepto de naturaleza ocupa en nuestro paradigma cultural. Al comparar dos ideas tan opuestas de concebir el entorno, estas dos autoras nos llevan a reconsiderar nuestro comportamiento antropocéntrico y nuestra posición como parte de un ecosistema del que dependemos. Pero la propuesta de estas escritoras no se limita a explorar nuestro paradigma cultural sino que conlleva la propuesta de un sistema de valores alternativo en el que la naturaleza se entiende como parte del ser humano y viceversa. Por lo tanto, estas obras reflejan los objetivos del ecofeminismo, siendo una de las principales premisas de esta filosofía la idea de que la razón de la crisis medioambiental de nuestros días es producto del desplazamiento del ser humano de su entorno natural, tanto física como culturalmente. Los/as ecofeministas argumentan que para poder interactuar de forma sana e igualitaria con la naturaleza es necesario que nuestra relación con el medio ambiente se base en los conceptos de interdependencia e interconexión. Considerando estas ideas, las civilizaciones alienígenas que aparecen en *Lilith's Brood* y *A Door into Ocean* funcionan como experimentos literarios en los que se desarrollan paradigmas ecofeministas, demostrando como la ciencia ficción puede servir como vehículo de concienciación ecológica.

El siguiente elemento en el análisis temático de las novelas se centra en la representación del concepto de ciencia en las obras, y en cómo la investigación científica retratada está condicionada por la relación de los humanos y los alienígenas con la naturaleza. Además, y por su estrecha vinculación con el tema de la ciencia, es de especial interés explorar cómo las autoras tratan el tema de la manipulación genética por sus implicaciones éticas. Al explorar la relación de los Oankali y las Sharers con la ciencia, lo primero que llama la atención del lector es que estas sociedades conciben la investigación científica como una rutina diaria y no como un conocimiento minoritario. Los Oankali poseen unos miembros y órganos especiales que les permiten realizar complejas modificaciones bioquímicas de forma natural. De hecho, los Oankali se refieren a la ingeniería genética como una necesidad fisiológica ya que su evolución y supervivencia se basa en combinar sus genes con los de

otras especie. En el caso de las Sharers, la capacidad para alterar genéticamente organismos no es una habilidad natural sino el resultado de muchos años de estudio y observación del comportamiento de la naturaleza. Para ellas, la ciencia es parte de la cultura y la usan para entender el mundo que les rodea, pero no desde la manipulación y la explotación sino desde el respeto y la observación. Es precisamente este profundo conocimiento científico el que permite a las Sharers ser conscientes de la red formada por todos los seres vivos que cohabitan en Shora, y por lo tanto, de su rol en el ecosistema.

La ingeniería genética es uno de los temas principales tanto en *Lilith's Brood* como en *A Door into Ocean*, y ambas autoras destacan sus aspectos positivos y cómo las modificaciones genéticas pueden mejorar el cuerpo humano haciéndolo más fuerte y resistente a la enfermedad, pero también facilitando su adaptación a otros hábitats. Sin embargo, las autoras, a través de la voz de algunos personajes, también advierten sobre las implicaciones éticas de ciertos experimentos así como sobre el mal uso de la manipulación genética. Aunque los Oankali llevan a cabo alteraciones bioquímicas sin causar ningún daño físico, no son conscientes de la problemática ética y de las posibles consecuencias psicológicas de algunas de sus prácticas. Por ejemplo, a través de los pensamientos y sentimientos de Lilith percibimos cómo las modificaciones que sufre su cuerpo suponen un problema ya que los Oankali no han pedido su consentimiento, aun cuando en principio estos cambios son beneficiosos. De esta forma, la idea del consentimiento informado se convierte en una pieza clave en cómo Butler aborda el tema de la manipulación genética. En el caso de *A Door into Ocean*, las Sharers muestran una profunda preocupación por las consecuencias de cualquier alteración en el equilibrio del ecosistema, por lo que a pesar del gran potencial de sus conocimientos científicos, limitan sus acciones a aquellas cuyas consecuencias pueden prever.

En *Lilith's Brood* existen algunos episodios, especialmente en la primera parte de la novela, que llevan al lector a cuestionarse el uso de animales no humanos en la experimentación científica. Algunos de los tratamientos a los que los humanos se ven sometidos a manos de los Oankali se asemejan a los que sufren muchos animales, una comparación que se ve reforzada con la repetida identificación de Lilith con una mascota. Pero la inferiorización a la que están sujetos los humanos de la novela no sólo nace de su pérdida de derechos y libertades al convertirse, según su propio juicio, en animales enjaulados. Esta inferiorización también surge de la idea de que el ser humano no es más que un código genético que los Oankali pueden modificar a su antojo, lo que priva a los humanos del estatus privilegiado autoimpuesto en la cultura antropocéntrica. Esta deconstrucción de la

identidad humana en componentes bioquímicos sitúa al ser humano al mismo nivel que otras especies del hábitat terrestre, respaldando así la idea ecofeminista (y ecologista en general) de que los seres humanos no son más que otra parte del ecosistema.

En relación con el tema de la ciencia y de la manipulación genética en las novelas, es necesario analizar las técnicas reproductivas de las sociedades alienígenas retratadas. Tanto los Oankali como las Sharers conciben la reproducción como un proceso científico premeditado más que como un proceso natural espontáneo o emocional. En primer lugar, en la sociedad Oankali los ooloi son los encargados de llevar a cabo las modificaciones bioquímicas necesarias para dejar a la hembra embarazada, mezclando el ADN de los tres miembros de la familia. Una vez que el comercio genético con los humanos comienza, la reproducción humana pasa a manos de los ooloi, que usa la información genética de los padres humanos y los padres Oankali para crear un embrión sano.

En segundo lugar, en *A Door into Ocean* la reproducción también se convierte en un proceso científico programado. Como todas las Sharers son mujeres, la reproducción natural queda descartada por lo que recurren a la producción de un embrión a través de técnicas de reproducción asistida gracias a sus amplios conocimientos bioquímicos. Antes de que una Sharer se quede embarazada necesita que las demás Sharers estén de acuerdo, y una vez que el permiso se concede, una de las Sharers llamadas *lifeshaper* ("formadora de vida") lleva a cabo el proceso bioquímico. Por lo tanto, en ambas novelas la reproducción pierde su naturalidad para convertirse en un proceso controlado y hasta cierto punto artificial. Hasta cierto punto este control de natalidad puede interpretarse como base para la sostenibilidad, especialmente en el caso de las Sharers. Estas mujeres conocen las limitaciones de su ecosistema y saben que la población debe permanecer estable para que la vida en Shora sea sostenible teniendo en cuenta sus recursos. Aunque estos procesos reproductivos puedan parecer distantes y artificiales, el rol de los padres en el embarazo y el parto es vital para el desarrollo del bebé y se considera casi una experiencia comunitaria. Para los Oankali, la presencia de todos los miembros de la familia es esencial para que el bebé se sienta acogido en este mundo. Para las Sharers, y por su idea de que todas las criaturas del planeta forman una familia, la educación de las niñas se entiende como una experiencia comunitaria en la que todas participan compartiendo su sabiduría y experiencias.

Finalmente, hay un último aspecto relacionado con la representación de la investigación científica en las novelas que me gustaría comentar. En ambas sociedades alienígenas la idea de progreso está asociada con la sostenibilidad y con lo orgánico, mientras que los humanos de Butler y los Valans de Slonczewski relacionan el progreso con el mundo

industrial y la capacidad armamentística. En *Lilith's Brood* vemos cómo los humanos que se resisten intentan volver al estilo de vida anterior a la guerra y construyen ciudades y fábricas de armas reutilizando restos que encuentran en la selva. Los humanos que aceptan el comercio con los Oankali adaptan su vida al estilo de los alienígenas, viviendo en pequeños poblados autosuficientes y sostenibles construidos con una sustancia orgánica similar a la que usan en sus naves. Por eso, cuando Tino llega a Lo, el poblado donde viven Lilith y su familia, se sorprende al ver el estilo humilde de sus residencias. Ante su sorpresa, Wray, otro de los habitantes de Lo, le dice que lo que allí construyen es una nueva forma de vida por lo que no dan importancia a las estructuras superficiales.

En *A Door into Ocean*, los Valans también conciben el progreso científico en términos de infraestructuras y armas, es decir, en la capacidad de ejercer poder y control sobre otros. Cuando llegan a Shora infravaloran la tecnología Sharer porque la juzgan según su estándar, y por eso son incapaces de entender el conocimiento científico de estas mujeres. Como en el caso de los Oankali, la ciencia de las Sharers es eminentemente orgánica y su idea de progreso se fundamenta en la autosuficiencia y la sostenibilidad, más que en imponer su voluntad. Esta forma de entender la ciencia refleja la mentalidad de los/as ecofeministas sociales, que defienden el avance científico porque creen que las mismas técnicas que se han usado para explotar la naturaleza pueden usarse para liberarla. De esta forma, Butler y Slonczewski ofrecen una visión del avance científico y del progreso que se basa en entender la naturaleza en sí misma y no en su explotación en busca de recursos para el ser humano.

Tras analizar la representación de la ciencia, el comentario temático de las novelas se centra en el concepto de género y cómo éste se desarrolla. Desde una primera aproximación a las obras el lector se percata de cómo las autoras desafían las ideas tradicionales en torno al género. En *Lilith's Brood*, la presencia de una especie alienígena dividida en tres sexos diferentes desestabiliza nuestra categorías culturales en torno a este concepto. Lo interesante de la sociedad Oankali en este sentido es que a pesar del aparente poder que poseen los ooloi, ya que son los encargados de la reproducción y de llevar a cabo las alteraciones genéticas más complejas, su estatus no es superior al de los machos o las hembras. Dado que los Oankali no creen en las jerarquías, son incapaces de entender que un grupo, por su condición sexual, pueda imponer sus intereses a los otros dos. La ausencia de discriminación sexual también está relacionada con el hecho de que los Oankali no poseen un sexo determinado hasta que que sufren una metamorfosis que indica el comienzo de la vida adulta. Por esta razón, los niños Oankali no reciben una educación prejuiciada condicionada por su sexo sino que la igualdad se fundamenta desde los primeros años de vida. Cuando comienza el comercio

genético con los seres humanos, la barrera entre masculino y femenino se vuelve fluida y compleja. Por ejemplo, los ooloi descendientes de humanos y Oankali, como es el caso de Jodahs, son capaces de alterar su aspecto no sólo para adaptarse al entorno sino también para satisfacer los gustos de las personas que les rodean. De esta forma, el dualismo mujer/hombre, o masculino/femenino, deja de tener valor en favor de una identidad de género más fluida e independiente del género biológico.

En *A Door into Ocean*, Slonczewski cuestiona los roles tradicionalmente asociados con el sexo femenino y las estructuras patriarcales al centrar la novela en una sociedad compuesta sólo por mujeres. Aunque la autora opta por el formato de la utopía feminista, usada por otras escritoras de ciencia ficción, los conflictos de género se exploran por medio del diálogo de las dos civilizaciones que aparecen en el libro. Por un lado, los Valans aparecen representados como una sociedad eminentemente patriarcal. A pesar de que las mujeres de clase alta y de profesión militar gozan de un estatus elevado, las mujeres de clase media-baja se ven discriminadas y se les atribuyen roles tradicionalistas como el de mujer y madre. Además, los Valans se caracterizan por estructuras y valores asociados con el género masculino como las jerarquías de poder o la violencia. Por otro lado, las Sharers suponen un fuerte contraste ya que los valores que defienden son los que históricamente se han asociado con las mujeres: la curación, la maternidad, el pacifismo y la empatía.

El diálogo entre civilizaciones, y entre géneros, se centra principalmente en el personaje de Spinel, el joven Valan que viaja voluntariamente a Shora. Cuando el joven desembarca en el planeta-océano pasa a convertirse en el *otro*, por su condición de Valan entre las Sharers y por ser un hombre en una sociedad femenina (y feminista). Sin embargo, Spinel termina adaptándose al estilo de vida Sharer hasta el punto de que decide quedarse allí en vez de regresar a su planeta de origen. En contraste con Spinel encontramos a los personajes de Jade y Nisi. Jade, oficial del ejército Valan, aparece descrita como una mujer fría que no es capaz de empatizar con las Sharers mientras las tortura para sacar información. Su falta de compasión y su carácter autoritario y violencia parece situarla más próxima al género masculino que al femenino, si consideramos el paradigma cultural del patriarcado. Nisi, que ha pasado largas temporadas en Shora viviendo como una más, también termina recurriendo a la violencia renunciando al pacifismo que caracteriza a las Sharers. A través de la evolución de estos personajes Slonczewski parece cuestionar la rigidez de las categorías de género y opta por una actitud más dialogante. El desarrollo de Spinel, que termina rechazando la jerarquía y el patriarcado y abrazando la igualdad, podría entenderse como una metáfora del cambio de paradigma que el ecofeminismo cree necesario para el futuro del ser humano.

En relación con el tema del género, las autoras también exploran el concepto de familia, ofreciendo estructuras alternativas a la de la familia tradicional. En *Lilith's Brood* los humanos que resisten intentan recrear la estructura familiar tradicional, pero la imposibilidad de tener hijos debido a la esterilización masiva realizada por los Oankali, hace que sus intentos resulten en frustración y en algunos casos hasta en violencia hacia las mujeres. Otro de los resultados de esta situación de impotencia es el secuestro de niños híbridos, como el caso de Akin, uno de los hijos de Lilith, mientras que su aspecto es aún humano antes de su metamorfosis. La otra estructura familiar planteada en esta novela es la que establecen los Oankali con sus compañeros humanos. Estas familias se caracterizan por su hibridismo ya que están compuestas por tres progenitores Oankali (hembra, macho y ooloi), dos padres humanos (hombre y mujer) y una gran cantidad de niños con ADN mitad alienígena, mitad humano. Algunos hijos nacen de la madre Oankali y otros de la madre humana, pero todos tienen genes comunes y son tratados en igualdad por los cinco progenitores. La unión que existe entre todos los miembros de una de estas familias híbridas es tan fuerte que incluso Lilith reconoce que nunca había sentido un vínculo tan profundo, ni siquiera con su marido y su hijo, que murieron durante la guerra. Otro aspecto a destacar en este tipo de familias es que todos los progenitores tienen los mismos roles, todos se encargan en igualdad de las tareas relacionadas con el cultivo de alimentos así como de la cría de los hijos.

En *A Door into Ocean* también se ofrece una interpretación alternativa del concepto de familia. En Valedon, las familias son similares a las nuestras ya que siguen un modelo patriarcal. Sin embargo, en Shora la unidad familiar es completamente diferente debido a la ausencia de hombres. Las Sharers no se casan, o al menos no se menciona ningún ritual de este tipo en el libro, pero sí se emparejan con otras Sharers con las que mantienen relaciones sentimentales y sexuales. Merwen y Usha son el ejemplo más visible de este tipo de familia ya que el libro se centra en ellas y en sus hijas naturales y adoptadas. Con esta normalización de las familias con padres del mismo sexo, podríamos entender que Slonczewski parece defender la causa homosexual. No obstante, las Sharers no pueden describirse como homosexuales ya que Lystra termina enamorándose de Spinel después de haber tenido una relación con otra Sharer, por lo que podríamos concluir que las Sharers son capaces de enamorarse cualquier individuo independientemente de si es hombre o mujer. Otro aspecto relevante en la unidad familiar de las Sharers es que la relación entre las diferentes familias es muy cercana, tanto que las Sharers se refieren entre sí como "hermanas". En esta sociedad los valores comunales prevalecen sobre los individuales, lo que hace que el diálogo sea una pieza clave a la hora de tomar decisiones que afectan a toda la población.

Hasta ahora hemos podido observar el claro contraste que existe entre la civilización humana/Valan y la Oankali/Sharer en términos de ciencia, relación con el medio ambiente y género. Sin embargo, y ya que el alienígena es un personaje esencial en la historia de la ciencia ficción, he querido dedicar una sección del comentario temático a estudiar el dualismo humano/alienígena como metáfora de nuestra relación con el *otro.* El tema de la alteridad ha estado siempre presente en la ciencia ficción, y por eso un enfoque ecofeminista es apropiado para este tipo de obras, ya que el ecofeminismo analiza cómo el *otro* ha sido dominado y oprimido en ciertos sistemas sociales. Tanto Butler como Slonczewski exploran el tema de la alteridad al centrar sus novelas en la relación entre humanos y alienígenas, eso es, en la identidad del *otro*. Pero estas autoras no se limitan a describir los conflictos entre dos civilizaciones sino que juegan con la frontera entre humano y alienígena (entre el ser y el *otro*) de manera que los lectores consiguen una visión completa a través de su identificación con los personajes oprimidos. Al desestabilizar el dualismo humano/alienígena, Butler y Slonczewski nos llevan a reflexionar sobre cómo concebimos la alteridad y cómo reaccionamos ante lo diferente, ante el *otro*, cuando somos nosotros a los que nos asigna esa etiqueta.

Como hemos visto, si analizamos *Lilith's Brood* y *A Door into Ocean* centrándonos en la forma y en las voces narrativas, la principal conclusión a la que llegamos es que la barrera entre humano y alienígena (ser y *otro*) se caracteriza por la fluidez. En *Lilith's Brood* el concepto clave en la relación entre los humanos y los Oankali es el hibridismo, ya que el único futuro posible que se les plantea a los seres humanos pasa por mezclar su ADN con el de los Oankali dando lugar a una descendencia común. Es en esta progenie híbrida donde reside la salvación de la humanidad (o al menos de parte del ser humano) ya que carecen de los genes que determinan, según los Oankali, su pensamiento jerárquico. Pero, como ya se ha comentado anteriormente, este comercio genético también permite a los descendientes ooloi modificar su apariencia física, imposibilitando la rígida categorización que caracteriza nuestro paradigma cultural en términos de hombre/mujer, humano/animal, ser/*otro.* Por lo tanto, la sociedad futura que Butler imagina no da lugar a ningún tipo de discriminación basada en una característica física que diferencie a un grupo de individuos de otro, rechazando así las jerarquías de poder y los dualismos.

En el caso de *A Door into Ocean* la barrera entre humano y alienígena está también confusa, incluso desde una perspectiva conceptual, ya que tanto Valans como Sharers no reconocen a la otra civilización como humana. Para los Valans, las Sharers son criaturas que parecen más animales que humanas por sus diferencias físicas, lo que puede resultar curioso

al lector cuando descubre que proceden del mismo origen y que ambos seres son humanos desde un punto de vista biológico y cultural. De forma similar, las Sharers piensan que los Valans no son de todo humanos, o al menos que no son adultos, debido a su comportamiento violento. La principal diferencia entre ambas civilizaciones es que los Valans ni siquiera se plantean analizar la humanidad de las Sharers y directamente las menosprecian y torturan durante la invasión de Shora. Sin embargo, algunas Sharers sí que se preocupan por observar y convivir con los Valans con el fin de descubrir si son humanos o no. El lector vive todo este proceso a través de los ojos de diferentes personajes, posicionándose tanto en el poder como en la subordinación, lo que ayuda a comprender que la solución al rechazo del *otro* se basa en prestar atención a las similitudes antes que a las diferencias, algo que las Sharers hacen y en lo que los Valans ni siquiera se molestan.

Algunos de los humanos retratados por Butler, así como la mayoría de los Valans de Slonczewski representan los problemas de nuestra sociedad y de nuestro sistema de valores en lo que refiere al *otro*, tanto humano como no humano. Los paradigmas culturales de muchos de los humanos que resisten a los Oankali y de los Valans, que muestran los mismo fallos que los/as ecofeministas identifican en el nuestro, aparecen descritos como abocados al desastre y la extinción (los humanos de Butler no podrán tener hijos y la civilización de Valedon terminará siendo reemplazada). Sin embargo, las autoras también plantean la salvación, aunque ésta pasa por una transformación cultural (e incluso física). Si consideramos los finales de las dos novelas parece que las autoras insinúan que para sobrevivir necesitamos reconsiderar nuestra relación con el *otro* (incluyendo en esta categoría el mundo natural), y que esto sólo puede conseguirse redefiniendo el concepto de ser humano. En el caso de *Lilith's Brood* la humanidad sólo sobrevive parcialmente en los descendientes híbridos, pero a pesar de su herencia alienígena, estas criaturas aún conservan algunas de las características típicamente asociadas con la idea de humanidad como la compasión y la empatía. En *A Door into Ocean*, su evolución física y psicológica lleva a Spinel a comprender que el estilo de vida Sharer es más sano y sostenible que el de los Valans.

En relación con la aceptación del *otro* y con la opresión a la que éste se ha visto sujeto, la última sección del comentario temático de las novelas está dedicada al análisis de las obras desde una perspectiva ecofeminista. El punto de partida de esta tesis es la idea de cómo algunas obras de ciencia ficción pueden reflejar inquietudes ecofeministas, promoviendo así una relación más sana con el denominado *otro* por medio de la reflexión sobre nuestro paradigma cultural. A través del contraste entre las sociedades humana/Valan y la Oankali/Sharer, Butler y Slonczewski ponen de manifiesto las debilidades y los defectos de

nuestro sistema de valores en cuanto a alteridad se refiere. En *Lilith's Brood* vemos actitudes opresivas tanto en el caso de los humanos como en el de los Oankali. Como ya se ha comentado, los humanos que retrata Butler son criaturas violentas que casi destruyen el planeta sin pensar en las implicaciones para su propia supervivencia. Incluso tras el rescate alienígena, muchos humanos continúan desarrollando conductas agresivas tanto hacia los Oankali como hacia otros humanos, a menudo por temas raciales, un comportamiento que contrasta con el de los humanos que aceptan a los Oankali. Sin embargo, los propios Oankali resultan criaturas ambiguas si consideramos algunas de sus prácticas. A pesar de que sus valores se aproximan a las ideas postuladas por los/as ecofeministas, los Oankali adoptan una actitud condescendiente y paternalista hacia los humanos privándoles de su libertad y de su derecho a elegir.

Las implicaciones éticas de las operaciones médicas a las que los Onakali someten a los humanos, a pesar de sus beneficios, hacen que su comportamiento sea problemático. Quizá el ejemplo más significativo de estas prácticas sea la esterilización masiva de los humanos como medida preventiva porque les priva de su derecho a sobrevivir. No obstante, y en relación con en el ecofeminismo, la sociedad híbrida que resulta del comercio genético es la que verdaderamente refleja de forma más cercana los valores y actitudes que una sociedad ecofeminista poseería. Debido a su identidad parcialmente humana estos híbridos son capaces de entender el malestar de los humanos al ser sometidos, aunque sea por su propio bien, a ciertos tratamientos. Además, como Akin demuestra, estos híbridos también son emocionalmente sensibles a la impotencia de los humanos ante su incapacidad de tener hijos, algo que los Oankali no son capaces de percibir empáticamente.

En *A Door into Ocean* el contraste entre Valans y Sharers es bastante claro si analizamos las novelas desde un punto de vista ecofeminista. Los Valans basan su cultura, y su economía, en el control y la explotación tanto de personas como de recursos naturales. En la novela podemos ver ejemplos de comportamientos asociados con actitudes opresivas como el clasismo, el especismo o la xenofobia. De esta forma, el paradigma cultural de los Valans es fácilmente relacionable con el nuestro en términos de debilidades y defectos. Los problemas en el sistema de valores de los Valans se vuelven aún más evidentes cuando comparamos su civilización con las de las Sharers. Las Sharers basan su estilo de vida en la creencia de que todos los seres vivos de Shora forman una red interconectada e interdependiente por lo que su relación con el *otro* es respetuosa y comprensiva. Esta creencia también se refleja en su relación con el medio ambiente, ya las Sharers han desarrollado una profunda conciencia medioambiental, también sustentada en sus profundos conocimientos

científicos. Con la evolución de Spinel, pasando de la cultura Valan a la Sharer, Slonczewski muestra que un cambio profundo en el paradigma cultural es posible, reflejando así las inquietudes y las premisas del ecofeminismo.

A lo largo de esta tesis doctoral hemos podido comprobar cómo *Lilith's Brood* y *A Door into Ocean* reflejan los principales objetivos del ecofeminismo. Por un lado, exploran las actitudes opresivas y los patrones de dominación, extrapolando los conflictos y defectos de nuestro paradigma cultural a una realidad alternativa. De esta forma nos permiten analizar críticamente los problemas de nuestro sistema de valores desde el punto de vista de un observador externo. Por otro lado, las autoras ofrecen un estilo de vida alternativo que refleja los valores ecofeministas de interdependencia, interconexión, respeto y pacifismo. Por lo tanto, algunas obras de ciencia ficción se convierten en el vehículo de expresión de las preocupaciones e ideales ecofeministas, promoviendo así prácticas y actitudes más respetuosas hacia el *otro*, incluyendo el medio ambiente.

Si consideramos la razón por la que estas sociedades alienígenas son capaces de entender su lugar en el ecosistema, y por lo tanto creer en la interconexión y la interdependencia entre todas las formas de vida de su hábitat, probablemente la clave resida en su visión científica del mundo. Para muchos/as ecofeministas la Revolución Científica supuso el punto de inflexión en nuestra forma de concebir la naturaleza, ya que ésta pasó de ser una entidad respetada (y a veces adorada) a convertirse en un objeto de estudio. Para el ecofeminismo, y para muchos otros movimientos ecologistas, esta objetificación del medio ambiente resultó en un desplazamiento de los humanos del entorno natural, lo que ha llevado a su explotación y degradación. Por esta razón, algunos/as ecofeministas tienen una visión muy negativa del progreso científico ya que lo consideran culpable del desapego del hombre hacia la naturaleza. No obstante, el ecofeminismo social plantea que la ciencia que se ha usado para destruir la naturaleza puede usarse para conservarla, y es esta visión optimista del mundo científico la que Butler y Slonczewski exponen en sus obras.

La ciencia de los Oankali y las Sharers no se caracteriza por ser destructiva con el medio ambiente sino por su interés y curiosidad, lo que ha llevado a un profundo conocimiento del mundo que rodea a estas civilizaciones alienígenas. La ciencia de Oankali y Sharers forma parte de su rutina diaria y su cultura, de manera que para ellos naturaleza y cultura se encuentra directamente relacionadas. Por ello, la investigación científica es parte de la rutina diaria de estos alienígenas, de hecho, los Oankali realizan experimentos usando sus propios miembros y los laboratorios de las Sharers se encuentran en sus propias casas. Otro aspecto importante de la ciencia de Oankali y Sharers es que sus experimentos no implican

contaminación ni perjuicios, aunque en el caso del trato de los Oankali hacia los humanos existen conflictos éticos. Por último, la ciencia de los Oankali, e incluso más la de las Sharers, se centra en mejorar las condiciones de vida de todas las criaturas, pero sin alterar el equilibrio del ecosistema, una idea que refleja la premisa ecofeminista de que un sistema social sano debe considerar las necesidades humanas pero también las de los no humanos.

Al ofrecer tal descripción de la ciencia y la tecnología, Butler y Slonczewski parecen poner de manifiesto la necesidad de que desarrollemos un modelo de investigación científica más sostenible que sea capaz de respetar las necesidades de todos los elementos de un ecosistema. Pero esta transformación de nuestra idea de ciencia implicaría una transformación de nuestra forma de concebir la naturaleza. Cuando el medio ambiente se convirtió en objeto de estudio, el ser humano se posicionó por encima del resto de la naturaleza controlándola y ejerciendo un poder auto-impuesto. Como resultado, los hombres dejaron de verse como parte de la naturaleza, desapegándose de ella moralmente y haciendo así más fácil experimentar con animales no humanos y con la naturaleza en general sin sentir remordimiento alguno. Por ello, para llevar a cabo una nueva Revolución Científica primero necesitamos un cambio en nuestro paradigma cultural, que se caracteriza por un peligroso antropocentrismo. Como Carmen Flys comenta, necesitamos un paradigma que no sólo reconozca nuestra implicación ecológica y nuestra dependencia en la biosfera, sino que también perciba éticamente a los seres no humanos.

En las novelas analizadas en esta tesis hemos visto como la creencia en la interconexión entre todos los seres vivos es un elemento fundamental en un sistema social sostenible y sano. Pero para llegar a entender esta interconexión e interdependencia, los personajes humanos de Butler y los Valans necesitan atravesar una transformación tanto psicológica, como física, que les permita entender lo que significa ser el *otro.* En el caso de Lilith esta transformación es forzosa, pero tanto ella como Spinel, cuyo cambio es voluntario y consciente, tienen éxito en su proceso de adaptación a un nuevo estilo de vida. Aunque Lilith y Spinel no pueden considerarse individuos en posición de poder en sus mundos de origen ya que Lilith es una mujer afroamericana de clase media y Spinel pertenece a la clase obrera, cuando pasan a convertirse en el *otro* en una sociedad alienígena son capaces de comprender su verdadera posición en el ecosistema. El cambio que sufren Lilith y Spinel les hace ver que el ser humano no es ni mucho menos la criatura más importante del universo y que la vida podría continuar sin su presencia, lo que les permite desarrollar un nuevo sistema de valores basado en el respeto por la alteridad y el bienestar ecológico.

El paso de una posición de poder a una de impotencia es el punto de partida en la transformación de estos personajes. A través de la identificación del lector con estos personajes, entre otros, Butler y Slonczewski parece que nos llevan a cuestionar el antropocentrismo y el especieísmo como sistemas sociales insalubres condenados a desaparecer. A su vez, estas autoras muestran paradigmas culturales alternativos que se posicionan más próximos al ecocentrismo que al antropocentrismo. Una de las formas en que Butler y Slonczewski manifiestan la necesidad de un sistema de valores que rechace el especieísmo es a través de los personajes que hacen que nos cuestionemos la barrera que existen entre el ser humano, el animal no humano y el alienígena. En el caso de *Lilith's Brood*, Buler imagina el futuro de la humanidad en manos de una especie híbrida fruto del comercio genético entre Oankali y humanos. Pero este futuro sostenible conlleva muchos sacrificios para los humanos, que deben renunciar a su superioridad auto-impuesta al aceptar la alteridad. En *A Door into Ocean,* el sacrificio de Spinel es convertirse en el *otro* en el planeta Shora, un estatus que termina aceptando porque implica un futuro mejor y una vida más sana. En relación esta necesidad de aceptar e incluso abrazar la alteridad, los/as ecofeministas comentan que es necesario reconocer la continuidad del humano y el no humano y su interdependencia. Por ello es necesario prestar más atención a nuestras similitudes que a nuestras diferencias, y considerar esas diferencias por su valor único intrínseco y por su relevancia para la biodiversidad, algo que los protagonistas de las novelas finalmente consiguen.

Para concluir me gustaría considerar una cita que encuentro especialmente significativo considerando el objetivo de esta tesis, y porque vincula los mensajes de *Lilith's Brood* y *A Door into Ocean.* En una presentación en un congreso Joan Slonczewski habló sobre *Lilith's Brood* comentando que con el interés de los Oankali por los genes cancerígenos humanos Butler parece indicar que los humanos necesitamos aceptar al *otro* en aquel que es diferente, incluso si al principio parece una violación de nuestros valores. Aunque este comentario se centra en la obra de Butler, es fácil percibir cierta relación con la obra de la propia Slonczewski ya que en *A Door into Ocean* también está presente la idea de que debemos reconciliarnos con el *otro* incluso si nos parece una amenaza debido a nuestra ignorancia.

El principal objetivo de esta tesis es establecer una relación fructífera entre la ciencia ficción y el ecofeminismo interactúan. Teniendo en cuenta todas las ideas expuestas en este trabajo se puede concluir que la relación entre ciencia ficción y ecofeminismo puede describirse como simbiótica ya que ambos reciben beneficios. La presencia de ideales

ecofeministas hacen estas novelas atractivas a una audiencia más amplia ya que tratan temas que anteriormente no habían sido planteados en este género. Además, gracias al elemento "y si" de la ciencia ficción, los/as autores/as pueden plantear realidades alternativas basadas en valores ecofeministas, tal y como Butler y Slonczewski hacen de forma consciente o inconsciente. De esta manera, el ecofeminismo se beneficia de las interminables posibilidades de la ciencia ficción, un género que permite a los escritores experimentar literariamente con sociedades ecofeministas a través de civilizaciones inventadas. Por lo tanto, la interacción entre ciencia ficción y ecofeminismo puede describirse como una simbiosis literaria que anima a los lectores a imaginar un futuro más sano. Tanto Butler como Slonczewski usan sus trabajos para explorar las implicaciones y resultados de un cambio de paradigma cultural que conllevaría dejar atrás el pensamiento jerárquico y las actitudes opresivas en favor de la interdependencia, el respeto y la sostenibilidad. Ambas autoras invitan a los lectores a reflexionar sobre el futuro del ser humano, un futuro que depende de la redefinición de lo que significa ser humano a través del reconocimiento y aceptación de nuestra propia alteridad y de la del mundo que nos rodea.